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ON PLATO'S *EUTHYPHRO*

by

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©

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Dedication

To my Mother and Father with gratitude

Abstract

Plato's *Euthyphro* is about piety, which the Greeks considered to be one of the cardinal virtues, along with Wisdom, Courage, Moderation, and Justice. The subject and the setting of this dialogue are particularly poignant given that it takes place just prior Socrates' trial for impiety, a crime which the Philosopher's actions in the *Euthyphro* seem to acquit him of. The dialogue takes the form of a "lesson" in which Euthyphro, a foolish young religious fanatic who is impiously seeking to prosecute his own father, attempts to teach Socrates what the pious is. Although the enterprise appears to be a failure--since Socrates ostensibly refutes Euthyphro's sequence of definitions--a Platonic teaching on piety can be extracted from the dialogue. Without having the dialogic partners explicitly discuss them, Plato, in the course of the dialogue, raises some basic theological questions concerning the true nature of the divine and the human beings's relation to it. Parallel to this philosophical treatment of piety, the dialogue points toward the importance of piety for civic life and the purpose it might serve in the city.

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I. Introduction

Dramatically contemporaneous with the *Apology of Socrates*, the *Euthyphro*, Plato's dialogue on piety, takes place as Socrates is about to enter the Athenian courts for the purpose of attending a preliminary hearing of the indictment against him. [1] And although the greater part of the *Euthyphro* is ostensibly devoted to defining the pious, its particular setting as well as the preliminary exchanges of the two dialogic partners foreshadow Socrates' trial and his indictment for impiety, thus lending the entire encounter a special poignancy. Consequently, the *Apology* is a shadowy presence throughout this dialogue. And the reader, like an Athenian juror serving at the philosopher's subsequent trial, is required to consider the question of Socrates' own piety. The dialogue *Euthyphro*, were it to give a coherent account of what piety is, would presumably throw some light on this question. Yet on the surface of things, only an obscured type of teaching on piety and a noncommittal defence of Socrates seem to be indicated; the dialogue appears to end a miserable failure, without establishing what the pious is--due it seems to the ineptitude of Euthyphro, the man Plato has chosen to be Socrates' dialogic partner and "teacher". Hence, a fuller understanding of the Platonic teaching on piety and its implications with regard to Socrates calls for a closer, more comprehensive examination of the text than would be entailed in merely examining its sequence of explicit arguments.

Euthyphro, Socrates' sole interlocutor in this dialogue, can aptly be described as a young religious fanatic of an unorthodox bent. Upon hearing the news of Socrates' impending trial, he, like any well-meaning and sympathetic acquaintance, is properly indignant and launches into an unsolicited defence of the philosopher. It seems he regards Socrates as well as himself to be divinely inspired, and not suprisingly to him, both men appear mad to most

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[1] The English translation of the *Euthyphro* to be referred to throughout is from *Four Texts on Socrates*, translated with notes by Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984). Exceptions to this translation will be noted along with alternate sources where necessary. All subsequent references to pagination of the dialogue will be included in the body of the text by number only. References to other Platonic dialogues will include the name of the dialogue being discussed.

Apology of Socrates, also from West, *Four Texts on Socrates* 24b-c; cf.18b, 19b-c, 23c-d, henceforth to be referred to as the *Apology*.

people and as such are grievously misunderstood in the city. But in Euthyphro's case, his own account of himself lends some credibility to his reputed madness, for he is bringing a lawsuit against his father for murder, and on highly questionable grounds. By traditional standards--with which Socrates here seems to agree--Euthyphro is committing a grossly impious act. Athenians, like most men in most times, seem to hold the belief that sons owe respect to their fathers, and that father-punishing is impious.

Thus we can assume that Socrates is being ironic when in the dialogue he engages this apparently impious but arrogant and supremely confident young man to teach him the divine things, on the expressed hope that his re-education will endear him to his own indictor, Meletus. Indeed, the "lesson" which follows appears to be a manifest failure. Nevertheless, over the course of their conversation, Socrates does manage to shake Euthyphro's faith in his own wisdom, this being the philosopher's means to turn the utterly odd young man back toward more orthodox views.

At Socrates' urging, Euthyphro presents a sequence of three different definitions of the pious, all of which are no sooner stated than they are ostensibly refuted. First, Euthyphro attempts to define the pious in terms of his own particular actions, arguing that what he is doing is pious in that he is only doing what Zeus, "the most just of the gods", would do. Socrates rejects this on the grounds that it is at best an example of piety and not a *definition*, while incidentally confessing his annoyance at such stories as Euthyphro and others tell about the gods behaving in such ways. Next, the young man defines the pious as what is dear to the gods, and although Socrates considers this to be a "noble" definition, it too is refuted; if Euthyphro is correct in believing that the gods are at war with each other, such gods would be in dispute concerning what is dear to them, allowing for the possibility that the same thing could be both pious and impious. In response to this apparent paradox, they rework a third definition, saying that the pious is whatever *all* the gods love. Once again, Socrates catches Euthyphro in a contradiction, for in addition to defining the pious in this way, the diviner also wants to say that the gods love the pious *because* it is pious. As this makes piety antecedent to its being loved by the gods, such love can't be what *defines* the pious. The

"teacher" is thoroughly exasperated by their failed enterprise; he cannot make his wisdom "stand still" and he feels that Socrates is to blame. Euthyphro's "wisdom" thus placed in a dubious light, the philosopher undertakes to help him teach what the pious is. From this point until the end of the dialogue, he seems to direct Euthyphro back towards the standard Athenian notions of piety by means of a few carefully chosen questions.

In what follows, Socrates' approach to the problem no longer centres on establishing a definition of the pious. Instead, he seems intent on leading the unsuspecting Euthyphro to a consideration of what the *purpose* or function of piety is, and the first step in the philosopher's painstaking progression is to focus on the question of "piety's" relation to the "just". With the philosopher's assistance, Euthyphro redefines piety as a kind of justice, more precisely, as a part of justice, that having to do with tendance of the gods (as opposed to the tendance of men, which is apparently the remainder of justice), thus implying that piety is "justice" to the gods. By describing piety and justice as "tendances", he seems to bring them down to the level of practical justice in the city, which involves doing what is owed to other human beings.

In explicating what kind of "tendance" he is referring to, Euthyphro rejects the notion that the gods are tended like domestic animals (and thus similarly *improved* by human beings), preferring to describe what he means as a slavish kind of tendance. When asked what this tendance produces, he is vague, saying simply "many noble things". Pushed to be more specific, he obfuscates, alleging to Socrates that prayer and sacrifice please the gods and preserve human beings. Although Euthyphro indirectly seems to have revealed what human beings believe the gods' noble work is--preserving private families as well as the communities of cities--Socrates turns back to the question of establishing what piety is. For next they establish that piety is praying and sacrificing to the gods in order to get what we need from them. However, the gods, according to Euthyphro, don't get anything they need from human beings; rather, they are gratified, that is, they get what is dear to them.

At this point Socrates observes that they have reached a conclusion that was earlier rejected--that is, the third definition, that the pious is what is dear to the gods. He reminds

the thoroughly confused Euthyphro that they are contradicting themselves, and so must start all over again from the beginning, as the dialogue's defining problem is still unresolved. But whereas Socrates professes a desire that they continue to pursue the question together, Euthyphro, his lack of wisdom in these matters now painfully apparent, is only the more anxious to extricate himself from the investigation. He now claims that he is late for some appointment somewhere else.

And so the reader is left wondering, what is Plato teaching about the pious? Admittedly, neither the inconclusive ending of the dialogue nor the patent ineptitude of the supposedly expert interlocutor are unprecedented features in the Platonic corpus. A number of the dialogues, the so-called aporetic ones, all end apparently without solving the problem that has been discussed (e.g., *Laches*, *Charmides*, *Lysis*). However, the ostensible failure of the *Euthyphro* may be construed as supporting the contention that piety is not truly a virtue. Piety was commonly regarded by the Ancient Greeks to be one of five cardinal virtues--along with wisdom, moderation, courage, and justice--and is treated as such in *Protagoras* . Not only is each of these other "virtues" the subject of an individual dialogue, as is piety in *Euthyphro* (i.e., *Laches* on Courage, *Theages* on Wisdom, *Charmides* on Moderation, and the *Republic* on Justice), but they are also treated at length in the *Republic* as virtues; but piety is *not* presented there as an excellence of either a city or a man. And the *Republic* is the dialogue which, it could be argued, offers the most comprehensive view of the Platonic cosmos. [2]

[2] Socrates' final concern in founding the city in speech (before taking up a light to search for justice in the thicket) is to establish legislation bestowing on the "ancestral interpreter" responsibility for "Foundings of temples, sacrifices, and whatever else belongs to the care of gods, demons and heroes" in the city. Thus, he does appear to provide for piety in the city. Nevertheless, in his next breath, he fails to enumerate "piety" among the excellences or virtues of the city. Rather, he suggests only that the perfectly good city will be wise, courageous, moderate, and just, and that by identifying the first three of these qualities, the fourth (justice) will make itself conspicuous as the remaining part of virtue in the city (*Republic*, 427b-428a). As Allan Bloom points out in his interpretive essay on the *Republic*, "This procedure, however, is open to several obvious objections. Nothing has been done to establish that these four--and only these four--virtues are what makes a city good. Nor is there any indication that the interlocutors know what wisdom, moderation, and courage are, any more than they know what justice is

Moreover, unlike the other aporetic dialogues which begin with a critique of the commonly held opinions of a particular "virtue" and work their way toward some higher conception, or at least an understanding of what would constitute a higher conception, the *Euthyphro*--although Euthyphro himself is oblivious to the process--starts with a consideration of some of the higher metaphysical issues concerning piety and the divine, but ends up with the simple traditional recommendation of praying and sacrificing such as Homer's Proteus offers Menalaos (*Euthyphro*, 15d). [3] Moreover, the question is never explicitly raised in the *Euthyphro* as to whether or not piety is a *virtue*. In fact, the word 'virtue' (*arete*) does not appear in this dialogue. Nonetheless, presumably *Euthyphro is* Plato's dialogue devoted to the question of piety. Respect for him, and for the truth presumably manifest in what he writes, requires that all that is said and done in the dialogue--and all that is rather conspicuously not said and not done--be carefully examined and thoughtfully considered in an effort to uncover the author's deeper teaching as to the truth concerning piety.

Whether or not piety is in fact a virtue--truly a good or excellence of the human being--is perhaps the all-encompassing question of the dialogue. In Athens (as has often been the case elsewhere), impiety was considered to be a crime, and the Athenians believed--perhaps rightfully so--that they had some grounds for finding Socrates guilty of this crime according to statute. But what we really want to know is was Socrates guilty of a bad thing, of something that *properly* is a crime? Socrates, as *the* philosopher in Plato's dialogues, represents not only the epitome of the wise man, but the man who possesses all the human virtues developed to the fullest extent. So the problem might be better construed from a converse, albeit paradoxical, perspective: if Socrates has some dimension of goodness distinct from his other virtues that could reasonably be regarded as piety, then piety can be considered a virtue; if not, it cannot. Of course, this does not do away with the problem of

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[2](cont'd) These virtues have not been thematically discussed here, but we know from other Socratic dialogues that they are as problematic as justice." *The Republic of Plato*, translated with interpretive essay by Allan Bloom, (New York: Basic Books, 1968), p.373.

[3] cf. *The Odyssey of Homer*, translated by Richmond Lattimore, (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), IV, 351-569, p.74-80.

defining what piety is; how do we know if Socrates is pious unless we know what piety is? So while determining whether Socrates was impious according to the statutory definition of impiety *may* be comparatively straightforward, verifying the statute as a truthful reflection of piety is yet another matter. On the one hand, if piety is not truly a virtue, but merely a civic excellence upheld in Athens, then Socrates *may* be guilty only of a lapse in civic duty according to parochial Athenian standards. On the other hand, if piety is something other than the Athenians hold it to be, then the city itself may be somehow guilty of wrongfully punishing the philosopher. [4]

The Athenians obviously believed that they knew what piety is, and they were confident enough in their beliefs to put Socrates to death for violating their standard of it. According to the written accounts passed down to us, piety for the Greeks in general consisted in worshipping the ancestral gods according to ancestral custom. The playwrights, poets, orators and historians all portrayed piety as the faithful observance of praying and sacrificing to the gods, and of obedience to the laws believed to be sanctioned by the gods. Numas Denis Fustel de Coulanges, in his comprehensive study of the religion, laws, and institutions of Ancient Rome and Greece, *The Ancient City*, summarizes the character of Greek piety as it is reflected in the accounts that have been passed down:

> This religion was a badly connected assemblage of small creeds, of minute practices, of petty observances. It was not necessary to seek the meaning of them; there was no need for reflecting, or of giving a reason for them. The word "religion" did not signify what it signifies for us; by this word we understand a body of dogmas, a doctrine concerning god, a symbol of faith concerning what is in and around us. This same word, among the ancients, signifies rites, ceremonies, acts of exterior worship. The doctrine was of small account: the practices were the important part; these were obligatory and bound man.... Gods, heroes, dead men, claimed a material worship from him, and he paid them their debt, to keep them friendly, and, still more, not to make enemies of them. [5]

He also outlines religion's (originally) far-reaching role in the city's laws:

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[4] For my analysis and commentary on the dialogue, here and elsewhere in this essay, I am grateful to the comments of Leo Strauss in his lecture concerning *Euthyphro*. This previously unpublished lecture is now available in *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*, edited by Thomas L. Pangle, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp.187-206.

[5] Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City*, with foreword by Arnaldo Momigliano and S.C. Humphreys, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), p.159

> Among the Greeks...law was at first a part of religion. The ancient codes of the cities were a collection of rites, liturgical directions, and prayers, joined with legislative regulations. The laws concerning property and those concerning succession were scattered about in the midst of rules for sacrifices, for burial, and for the worship of the dead. [6]

Not only does the Platonic corpus corroborate this notion of piety; it also furnishes an on-going history of Socrates' conformity with the Athenian traditions of piety. Notice, for example, the *Republic* opens with a narration by Socrates concerning a religious festival he has come from attending; and in the *Phaedo*, before his body becomes lifeless, Socrates reminds his friend to sacrifice a cock unto Aesculapius, god of medicine (*Phaedo* 118a); in the *Apology* itself, where Socrates' friend Chaerephon is reported to have sought a pronouncement from the Oracle at Delphi (the interpretation of which Socrates appears to treat with great seriousness; *Apology* 20e-23e), the philosopher refers to "the god" and his service to "the god" no less than twenty-three times.

Socrates' outward conformity is also illustrated by his treatment of Euthyphro in this dialogue. The young Euthyphro is of an unorthodox bent, and although the orthodox Athenian conception of piety is never overtly asserted or identified as such in the *Euthyphro*, it is apparent that Socrates, by carefully engineering the discussion, is attempting to lead Euthyphro back to the orthodox ways, back to praying and sacrificing to the gods. Moreover, although Socrates does in this dialogue admit annoyance over the traditional tales told about the gods, he does not defame the notion of piety *per se*. Hence, according to Plato's portrayal in the *Euthyphro*, the Socrates we see is one who lends his support to the idea of a public conception of piety.

Notwithstanding Socrates' tacit support for the traditional views, however, there may be a deeper teaching concerning true piety built into Euthyphro's "lesson" on the pious, one which depends fundamentally upon *knowing* the divine things, i.e., the eternal ruling powers of the cosmos. A broad range of basic theological questions (questions that might lead us towards a clearer understanding of the divine) are hinted at in the course of scrutinizing Euthyphro's "definitions", but none is expressly taken up for discussion: should men attempt

[6] Ibid, p.178.

to *imitate* the divine, or rather *obey* it? Is there a multitude of gods, or simply one? And if there is a multitude of divine powers, do they "agree" on the important issues that affect human life? Indeed, do they have any direct involvement with human affairs? And we are ultimately invited to consider whether the divine powers are intelligible "gods" at all? So even though there is no clear statement about true piety in the dialogue, the *Euthyphro* does at least suggest some of the fundamental issues surrounding this problem.

Yet a further, more overtly political question remains: why does Plato conceal the broad theological questions and their implications, merely hinting that a higher conception exists, while concurrently and more overtly supporting traditional notions of piety? An explanation for this should perhaps begin with a consideration of Euthyphro's character. It is clear--almost from the outset--that Euthyphro is thoroughly unfit for truly rational inquiry. Even though largely without realizing it, he in effect rejects the ordinary traditional views while professing to be wise in the ways of the gods. He is quite unphilosophical, and as such incapable of a radical discussion on piety. But this only begs the question, for the problem remains: why have a Euthyphro in this dialogue of all dialogues? Why has Plato chosen this boastful, apparently ignorant diviner as Socrates' sole dialogic partner for the discussion of something seemingly so important? While Plato deliberately suggests that Socrates meets him by coincidence and does not appear especially eager to converse with him, the dialogue does bear Euthyphro's name as its title. Naming a dialogue after a man is more than a convenient label. As it is employed by Plato, rather, it seems to define the "bounds", so to speak, of the dialogue, not necessarily indicating that it is about the title character, but that it is *somehow* limited by him. At least on the surface, this dialogue seems to be limited by Euthyphro's character and the range of his abilities. Through a careful examination of the dialogue, then, we will see what it is that Socrates achieves with Euthyphro as his "limited" dialogic partner, and consequently discover what Plato intends to convey within this "limited" context about Socrates' piety.

II. The Indictment: Socrates' Piety (2a-3e)

It would perhaps be best to start at the beginning. The dialogue--born out of a chance meeting and perpetuated first by politeness and then by the philosopher's alleged desire to learn--commences with what could best be described as an interrogation. Euthyphro, mystified to find Socrates outside the Porch of the King, expresses his surprise in a few probing questions to Socrates, whose initial answers are brief, if not brusque, and seem intended to stifle the conversation, or at least they do little to help it along. Despite his less than encouraging reception, Euthyphro, who is probably among the minority of Athenians in not having heard about the indictment against Socrates, is eventually furnished with quite an informative--albeit apparently selective--account of the philosopher's legal entanglement. Although the lesson on piety is not taken up until later in the dialogue, it is here at the beginning that Socrates presents the problem of his own piety through his report of the indictment for impiety to this young religious fanatic.

Their meeting at this place is accidental, and thus unanticipated. Socrates, as his later shocked reaction will reveal, knows nothing about Euthyphro's lawsuit, nor is there any evidence that he has concerned himself with the affairs of this young man in the past. And Euthyphro for his part has no inkling of Socrates' reason for being outside the Porch of the King--despite Socrates' controversial prominence in Athens and the likelihood of the city's being abuzz with news of the indictment. It seems that, though acquainted, they are not men who are accustomed to spending time together.

So any meeting of these two men would seem to be coincidental. It is all the more remarkable, then, that Plato here portrays them in simultaneous "out-of-the-ordinary" preliminary hearings before the King. In this respect, the dialogue presents an encounter that is not of Socrates' own choosing, but one which Plato has chosen to arrange "by chance", or possibly, by some divine twist of fate. And although it is Socrates who instigates the principal discussion following these initial polite exchanges, Euthyphro's incompetence as an "expert" and his lack of capacity for clear thinking leave one wondering if a dialogue on piety would not have been more fruitfully conducted in the company of brighter youth such as those with

whom Socrates is more accustomed to spending his time. Ironically, as though to call attention to this problem, Plato has Euthyphro, in his opening speech, make mention of Socrates' usual haunts at the gymnasium at Lyceum--the kind of place where Socrates might find and converse with more philosophically inclined young men, the kind who could fruitfully partake of a theoretical discussion of piety (cf. 2a).

The two men know each other in at least a minimal sense, for they acknowledge each other by name. True, Athens was a small city by modern standards and offered frequent opportunities for civic involvement whereby one could become personally acquainted with one's fellow citizens. But as Socrates' later comments concerning his unfamiliarity with his own accuser will indicate (he doesn't know Meletus' parentage, nor much of any thing else about him), the bond of shared Athenian citizenship does not guarantee that every citizen will know every other citizen, and especially not those who are comparatively young (as are both Meletus and Euthyphro). The old philosopher and the young religious enthusiast are, moreover, somewhat acquainted with each other's characters. Euthyphro, the first to betray his familiarity in remarking on Socrates' unusual presence at the Porch of the King, has also heard of the philosopher's *daimonion* (3b-c). Because of this, he seems to presume a certain kinship with Socrates insofar as he himself professes to enjoy a special relationship with the divine (3c, 4d-5a). Socrates also displays some familiarity with Euthyphro, referring to him as a diviner (*mantis*), but whether Socrates has gleaned this from Euthyphro's preceding speech, or speaks on the basis of actual previous experience with the man or his reputation, is not made clear in the dialogue. In fact, nothing in the dialogue precludes the possibility that they both know each other *only* by sight and reputation, despite the facility with which they use each others' names. In the *Cratylus*, Socrates refers to a character called Euthyphro, a sort of divine etymologist, whose wisdom Socrates alleges has taken possession of his own soul (*Cratylus*, 396d-e). Possibly, they are one and the same, but the obscure--not to say bizarre--subject matter of the *Cratylus*, and Socrates' overtly ironic manner of dealing with that character in the discussion, make it difficult to see how that reference to "Euthyphro" helps either to explicate this Euthyphro's character, or to establish what relationship existed

between this Euthyphro and Socrates.

Euthyphro speaks first, and not with some polite conventional greeting to Socrates, but abruptly asks, "What is new, Socrates, that you have left the places in Lyceum where you usually spend your time and are now spending time here around the Porch of the King?" (2a). Although the expression is idiomatic, Plato's choice of opening phrase is ironically poignant. Whether Euthyphro knows it or not, there is much that qualifies as "new" in Socrates' life of late. His question betrays his ignorance of the charges Socrates is currently embroiled in, and consequently of Athenian public life. Socrates at seventy years of age is a senior citizen of Athens. He is well known for what he does--Aristophanes has long since written a comedy about him and his activities. [7] Thus, Socrates' "new" circumstances were something most Athenians would probably take an interest in. Moreover, the substance of the indictment, the allegation that he is a maker of "new" divinities (cf. 3b), lends an additional unintended irony to Euthyphro's introduction.

Euthyphro's opening speech also calls attention to what is truly an extraordinary setting for a Platonic dialogue. He knows enough about Socrates to know that the man usually spends his time at Lyceum, one of the well known gymnasiums situated outside the walls of Athens, a habit of Socrates' amply confirmed elsewhere in the Platonic corpus. [8] So it appears that Socrates is not where he would choose to be--talking to the young men who gathered at Lyceum--rather, he is attending an appointment at the Porch of the King, which only the legal apparatus of Athens could prevail on him to honor; and his presence here brings him in contact with Euthyphro, a young man whose company he does not readily seek out.

The setting is especially poignant, given the formal inquiry Socrates and Euthyphro will conduct later in the dialogue, for the Porch of the King housed the political official charged with ensuring the observance of piety in the city, and whose responsibilities include

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[7] That is, *The Clouds*, in *Four Texts on Socrates*, West trans., p.115. (cf. *Apology* 19c, where Socrates acknowledges his notoriety due to Aristophanes' critical caricature of him).

[8] The gymnasium at Lyceum was the setting of *The Euthydemus*, and *Lysias*. It is also referred to in the *Symposium* as a haunt of Socrates, much as it is here in the *Euthyphro*.

conducting hearings with regard to judicial cases in matters of piety and religion. By official standards, then, if Socrates requires some guidance in pious matters, it is the King he should be speaking to, not Euthyphro. This requires some qualification, however, inasmuch as the "King" had by this time come to be selected arbitrarily by lot each year, and had little political authority. [9] Apparently the Athenians believed any normal citizen--that is, one who worshipped Athens' ancestral gods according to ancestral custom as the traditional notion of piety dictated--could function as the King. Thus, Socrates cannot be accused of bypassing evidently "superior" wisdom in making Euthyphro his teacher rather than the King. Nonetheless, he does not simply wish to be instructed in the accepted traditions and beliefs, the dogmas of Athens. Rather he undertakes a radical exploration concerning piety by questioning what the very nature of piety is. In this respect, the Porch of the King is an ironic, perhaps in a way even a blasphemous setting for this particular discussion.

While acknowledging that he himself is involved in a lawsuit, Euthyphro expresses mild disbelief that he should find Socrates similarly engaged. Apparently he is familiar enough with Socrates or his reputation to know that the man stays away from courts (cf. *Apology* 26a, *Republic* 405a-b). But Socrates is quick to point out that the Athenians don't call what he is involved in a lawsuit (*dike*) but an indictment (*graphe*). The terms *graphe* and *dike*,

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[9] An account of the King Archon and his responsibilities can be pieced together from Fustel de Coulanges' *The Ancient City*. Traced back to their tribal origins, the family or tribal head in Athens had both political and religious authority. As a priest, the king was known as an Archon or Prytane and was in charge of worship, keeping sacred fires, offering sacrifices, pronouncing prayers, and presiding at religious repasts (p.173). Athens was formed by a number of tribes which were united together and supposedly subordinate to a central magistry; the various tribal heads, however, not wishing to surrender their powers, relegated the office of King, or Archon in the city to a short-term elected position (p.241). By the time Athenian democracy was well established, political and religious offices were almost completely separated. At that time, in contrast to the Archons, who were selected by lot and had relatively little political power, the strategi--men who tended to military matters, international relations, financial and police matters--had real political power, and were elected (p.319). Democracy brought with it other officials enjoying political power: the senate, charged with executing laws, and above it, the assembly which was composed of all Athenian citizens (p.330-331). Of the remaining religious authorities, the Archon tended to domestic worship, the King performed the sacrifices and judged cases of impiety, the polemarch concerned himself with the army and foreign matters, and the six themothetae presided over juries (p.329, 242). Together these were known as the nine archons (p.242).

however, are not necessarily exclusive of each other. Whereas *graphe* referred specifically to public cases (which dealt with crimes against the city of Athens), *dike* might be used either to refer to private cases (pertaining to injuries against private individuals or families), or to *all* lawsuits in general. Thus, rather than correcting Euthyphro, it is more the case that Socrates is calling attention to the public nature of the action against him; an indictment is a lawsuit which concerns all Athenians.

Euthyphro's curiosity continues to mount. He presses Socrates to tell if he is prosecuting or defending, even while anticipating what his partner's answer will be:

> What are you saying? Someone as is likely, has brought an indictment against you. For I won't charge you with doing so against another(2b).

Socrates' reputation seems to be familiar to Euthyphro; it is not the philosopher's way to be initiating a court action, something which (as Euthyphro here tacitly reveals) is not altogether respectable, even in litigation-crazed Athens. So the philosopher's emphatic denial that it is he who is accusing others ("Certainly not!"; 2b), implicitly confirms that he will continue to live his life (now into its seventieth year) by questioning and teaching other men in private rather than summoning them before a public court (cf. *Apology* 26a). Having established positively that Socrates is the defendant, Euthyphro expresses a natural curiosity to know the name of the particular man who has initiated the case. Socrates finally responds in somewhat more ample terms, describing for Euthyphro the accuser in such a way as to emphasize both his youth and his comparative anonymity:

> I myself don't even recognize the man at all, Euthyphro. He is apparently someone young and unknown. But they say his name is Meletus, as I suppose. He is from the deme Pittheus, if you can think of some Pitthean Meletus with long straight hair, not quite full-bearded, but somewhat hook-nosed (2b).

It is unclear whether Socrates has built his description from the reports of others, or if he is personally acquainted with his accuser's general appearance such that he is able to fashion this portrait: he has a full head of long hair (i.e., worn in the Spartan style), but is not yet fully bearded; he is also graced with a hook-nose--perhaps the kind of nose which Socrates suggests in the *Republic* would be characterized as "kingly", at least by someone enamoured of such a person (474d-e). The undercurrent of Socrates' words calls into

question his young accuser's fitness to bring charges against an elderly citizen such as himself. For the traditional understanding of piety included proper reverence for ancestors, and this included not only respect for one's fathers and forefathers, but all of the elderly in general. Thus Meletus' action toward Socrates itself has a flavour of irreverence, his being so young and Socrates so old (cf. 12a).

In *The Apology*, Socrates lists not one, but three accusers: Meletus, on behalf of the poets; Anytus, on behalf of the craftsmen and politicians; and Lycon, on behalf of the orators (23e). Here, in explaining the case to Euthyphro, Socrates refers only to Meletus. And although Meletus may have been the single formal indictor, or at least the principal official accuser (cf. *Apology* 36a-b) since he is the only one Socrates cross-examines at the trial, it is possibly the case that Meletus is selected as the accuser most likely to arouse Euthyphro's interest. Meletus brings his action on behalf of the poets, an allegiance Euthyphro probably shares, given the poetic origins of his own account of the gods (cf. 5e-6a). There are further clear parallels to be drawn between Meletus and Euthyphro: young Meletus is indicting old Socrates for impiety, and young Euthyphro is prosecuting his old father in the name of peity; and both young men seem to be preoccupied with religious matters.

Meletus is from the deme Pittheus. Demes, political subdivisions of Athens, served to denote the location of one's home as well as one's tribal affiliation. They were introduced by Cleisthenes who, for the sake of taking sole political and religious power away from the ancestral tribes (making citizenship more widely available to slaves and other non-citizens), formed ten new tribes in Athens which were further subdivided into demes.[10] Men in Athens thereafter were known by their own name, their father's name, and by the name of their deme. It can therefore be inferred that since neither Meletus' father nor his family is mentioned, he is not from a prominent or "noble" family, or at least this is the impression Socrates wants to give.

Who then is this Meletus? The only other Platonic dialogue in which he actually appears is the *Apology*. The name "Meletus" itself calls to mind the Greek word *melete*

[10]Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City* , p.282.

meaning "care". But despite the ironic use his name lends itself to in that dialogue, he is not a purely fictional character inasmuch as the main features of Socrates' trial, including the name of his indictor, are historically confirmed elsewhere. [11] Efforts to find out more about this man Meletus are complicated by the large number of references to other Meletoi in the various records of the time, and the lack of a decisive means to distinguish between them. Although Socrates says in the *Apology* that Meletus is prosecuting on behalf of the poets, it is not made perfectly clear that he is himself a poet. Of the eight or so Meletoi recorded in various written works of the time, there is one poet, a tragedian ridiculed in Aristophanes' *Frogs*. [12] But it seems unlikely that Socrates could describe as 'young and unknown' a poet who had been immortalized by Aristophanes. Somewhat more probable, this Meletus could be the son or grandson of that poet, but if this were the case, Socrates might have better identified Meletus by referring to his ancestry.

There were other Meletoi recorded in the accounts of Athenian history of that time. Most notably, in the same year as Socrates' trial, Andocides (a prominent orator of the time) was also tried for impiety by a man called Meletus. In his account of the proceeding, known to posterity as *On the Mysteries*, Andokides says that this Meletus was among the five charged by the thirty tyrants with the task of arresting Leon of Salamis--an unjust event Socrates himself refused to take a part in, according to his own account in the *Apology*. [13] This connection seems fitting; while portraying Meletus as some kind of religious crusader against impiety, it suggests that Socrates' silence in the *Apology* concerning his accuser's part in the Salamis incident is intended by the philosopher to provide a powerful rhetorical contrast

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[11] See, e.g., Xenophon's *Apology of Socrates to the Jury*, in *Xenophon*, vol. 4, translated by E.C. Marchant and O.J. Todd, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1979), sections 10-13, 20, pp. 647-649, 650.

[12] First performed in 405 B.C.. *Four Plays by Aristophanes*, translated by William Arrowsmith, Richmond Lattimore, and Douglas Parker, (New York: New American Library, 1984), p.473.

There is also mention of such a poet in the remaining fragments of Aristophanes' *Farmers*. However, this play was probably produced in 424, making it unlikely that the 'young' Meletus of the *Euthyphro* could be the same man. See: Douglas MacDowell, *Andokides on the Mysteries*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), Appendix M. p.208.

[13] "On the Mysteries", in *Minor Attic Orators*, vol I, translated by K.J. Maidment (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1940); and *Apology of Socrates*, 32c-d.

between himself and his accuser (presuming this to be the same Meletus). We cannot with any certainty say that either or both of these Meletoi coincide with the Platonic Meletus; at least, no writer of the time offers explicit confirmation to this effect, but the dramatic parallels certainly raise interesting possibilities.

Euthyphro confesses he doesn't know Meletus either and immediately asks the logical question: "But what indictment has he brought against you?" (2b). This question is yet another dramatic reminder of his ignorance of the current affairs of Athens. "What indictment?" repeats Socrates, apparently in some amazement, but once again failing to give a direct answer. For he begins by ironically praising the action brought against him, and it is only in the course of explaining why it is "not an ignoble" charge that he informs Euthyphro that he has in fact been indicted for corrupting the young. And even by the end of this, one of the longest speeches in the dialogue, Socrates still has mentioned only half of the indictment; it will take further probing on Euthyphro's part to render the story of Socrates' alleged impiety more complete.[14]

This initial praise of Meletus' charge--and notice Socrates only says that the indictment is "not ignoble" (or, ill-bred; *aggenos*) which is not say that it is noble (*genos* or *kalos*), much less "altogether noble" (*pangkalos*; cf. 7a)--is quickly followed by a craftily worded justification. Socrates confides in Euthyphro that "...it is no paltry thing for one who is so young to have become cognizant of so great a matter. For as he asserts, he knows in what way the young are corrupted and who their corrupters are. And he is probably someone wise, and having discerned my ignorance, he is going before the city, as if before his mother, to accuse me of corrupting those of his own age" (2c). Now the "matter" Socrates appears to be speaking of is education, for if Meletus claims to know what corruption is--the worst kind of education, i.e., that which makes the subject bad--he is tacitly asserting that he knows

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[14] That is, he is accused of corrupting the young *by being a maker of gods*, as he later informs Euthyphro (2b). Yet besides the impiety and corruption charge mentioned here, in the *Apology* he also mentions the unofficial charges, the philosophic activities (the meddling and inquiring into things below the earth and heavenly things, *Apology*, 18b, 19b). These are remarkable by their absence in the *Euthyphro*. In fact, "philosophy", "philosophers" and related words do not appear in this dialogue at all.

what a *good* education consists of (cf. *Apology* 24d ff). And whereas we generally admire advanced knowledge at an early age--the mathematical genius and the musical prodigy, for example--a youthful cognizance of moral and political matters, and especially of perverse or corrupt mis-education, is more likely to arouse our suspicion. Since it is the young (typically) who undergo education, precisely for the reason that they are not yet capable of teaching themselves and are therefore in need of a teacher's guidance, Meletus' youth should make us wary of his ability to distinguish what is fair from what is corrupt.

Following upon his ironic praise of Meletus, Socrates elaborates his portrayal of the youthfulness of his accuser, likening the young man to one who goes before the city as if a child before his mother accusing Socrates of corrupting those his own age (2c) in the hope that she will settle disputes that he is unable (or perhaps too weak) to take care of himself. Besides its rhetorical value as a depreciation of his accuser--suggesting that Meletus lacks mature manliness and is cowardly--Socrates' characterizing the city as Meletus' *mother* also extends to the theme of education. For as it is used in the *Republic*, the metaphor of motherland is the foundation of the "noble lie", the myth told to the young to explain their early education and resulting political obligation to it and to each other (*Republic* 414d-e). But whereas there the young are taught they must plan for and defend their "mother and nurse", in Socrates' account of Meletus' relationship with the polis it is the mother who is implored by the young man to do the defending.

Socrates suggests, however, that Meletus, in his concern for educational matters, exhibits a certain superiority in that, "... he alone of the politicians [statesmen] appears to me to begin correctly. For it is correct to take care of the young first, so that they will be the best possible, just as a good farmer properly takes care of the young plants first, and after this of the others as well" (2c). The philosopher hereby likens the proper beginnings in politics to the art of farming, comparing the skillful cultivation of young men (education in the broader sense of general nurture) to the careful tending of sprouts by the farmer. According to this analogy, the educator must necessarily possess a superior wisdom compared to the many non-farmers, for he is not only greater in comparison to the things he tends but

to all who lack his expertise. His charges are likened to domestic plants; and while their nature is a useful and even beautiful one given proper nurture, it is also vulnerable to degeneration or extinction without the skilled farmer's protection.

Socrates supposes that Meletus-as-farmer considers the philosopher to be a weed, inimical to the welfare of young plants in the city: "And so Meletus is perhaps first cleaning us out, the corrupters of the young sprouts, as he asserts. Then, after this, it is clear that when he has taken care of the older ones, he will become the cause of the most and greatest good things for the city. At least that is the likely outcome for someone beginning from such a beginning" (2d-3a). So according to Socrates' characterization of him, Meletus regards the presence of the "corrupter"--perhaps by his encouraging scepticism and philosophical reflection among the city's youth--as unwelcome as nettles are in the vegetable garden. [15] That is, Meletus (and those of like mind) seems to believe there is *no* place for the philosopher in the city (dramatically epitomized by the effect of having Socrates put to death). Thus, a basic question looms in the background of this dialogue: can the philosopher and the city peacefully co-exist? The *Euthyphro* itself suggests some important evidence in favour of keeping the philosopher. As Socrates shortly informs Euthyphro, Meletus has accused him of corrupting the young by leading them away from the orthodox religious views. In this dialogue, however, we witness a display of his doing the very opposite, for he ends up directing Euthyphro away from his pernicious heterodox, impious views and back towards the traditional Athenian ways.

Socrates' irony lost on him, Euthyphro seems troubled by the apparent praise of Meletus and by the young man's potential to become the cause of the most and greatest good in the city:

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[15] The farming theme arises repeatedly in the dialogue. First of all, Euthyphro and his father are farmers by profession--perhaps Socrates knows that this analogy will have a particular appeal for Euthyphro (4c). Secondly, Socrates quotes a line of poetry which refers to Zeus as a sort of farmer in order to explicate the question of piety. "Zeus, the one who enclosed and planted all these things,/ You are not willing to speak of; for where dread is, there too is awe" (12a-b). Thirdly, Socrates compares the products the farmer produces with those of gods who have pious men in their service (14a).

> So I would wish, Socrates, but I am afraid that the opposite will happen. For he seems to me simply to be doing evil to the city, beginning from the hearth, by attempting to do injustice to you (3a).

Euthyphro apparently resents the "wise" Meletus (whom he has never met), and takes Socrates side in the dispute; he associates Socrates with the hearth, the home--a place that is sacred to the family, being the locus of familial religious observances and generally considered out of bounds to the civic authority. Though he seems oblivious to the fact, Euthyphro's own court case (which will soon make its way into the conversation) strongly parallels Meletus'; he himself wants to punish his own father--he is, as it were, attacking his very own hearth.

Having expressed his indignation, Euthyphro finally asks what it is Socrates allegedly does to corrupt the young. [16] Socrates' answer is not direct; "Strange things, you wondrous man, at least on first hearing. For he asserts that I am a maker of gods, and on this account--that I make novel gods and don't believe in the ancient ones--he has indicted me, as he asserts"(3b). And indeed, what Socrates is accused of doing does at first seem "strange" (literally, "out of place": *atopa*); men could not possibly make something so great as a god; it is the gods who are said to make men, not the reverse. However, the word *poiein* used by Euthyphro when he asks Socrates what it is Meletus asserts he *does* to corrupt the young, and employed by the philosopher to say that Meletus has accused him of *making* gods and is accused of being a "maker" (*poietes*), by Hellenic times had come to mean primarily "poet". Socrates' indictment can therefore be construed as an accusation that he is a "poet of the gods", not such a strange accusation after all. But according to Meletus, Socrates makes his gods in a criminal way; unlike other poets (makers), he doesn't just tell stories about the gods that are already acknowledged to exist--he allegedly repudiates these and substitutes instead novel ones of his own invention.

But newly made (i.e., newly portrayed) gods are not necessarily synonymous with illegitimate gods, for once upon a time the traditional accounts must have been novel also. As

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[16] Here, as in the *Apology*, Socrates integrates the charges against him into a single charge. He says he is charged with corrupting the young by way of making new gods, which he supposedly encourages the young to accept in place of the old traditional gods.

many poets before him--including the greatest, Hesiod and Homer--Socrates (if he actually acknowledged himself to be a maker) could claim divine inspiration in the form of a muse. But the philosopher does no such thing, for his alleged "making" rather involved contradicting and refuting certain of the tales told about Athenian gods. In this more limited sense, then, Socrates does in effect make "novel" gods, despite the names of the Athenian gods remaining the same in his accounts.

At the suggestion of Socrates' god-making, however, another equally credible explanation pops into Euthyphro's mind. Euthyphro assumes that Meletus' indictment has arisen not because of Socrates' views concerning the traditional conceptions of the gods, but because of his *daimonion*. This personal divine sign of Socrates', here merely mentioned but discussed by him on other occasions in the Platonic Corpus (including the *Apology* and the *Republic*, but most extensively in *Theages*) may also have been a source of displeasure for Meletus and those of his ilk insofar as the *daimonion* contributed to Socrates' special erotic appeal to the young men. And if indeed Meletus thought that Socrates was an atheist, it follows that he suspected that the divine sign was a sham. Euthyphro, on the other hand, eagerly accepts Socrates' *daimonion* as verification of his link to the divine.

> I understand, Socrates; it's because you assert that the *daimonion* comes to you on occasion. So he has brought this indictment, claiming that you are making innovations concerning the divine things, and he is going into the law court to slander you, knowing that such things are easy to make slander about before the many (3b-c).

Socrates ratifies neither the validity nor the interpretation of Euthyphro's understanding of the charges, though later in the dialogue he will offer a different explanation of the indictment, admitting that he regularly shows annoyance when he hears the traditional views of the gods as being enemies and at war with with each other (6a-b). But Euthyphro, who is wholly satisfied with his own account, restates the charges as he sees them, making what appear to be two significant modifications; he forgets about the corruption charge entirely and centres on the charges concerning the gods, and he translates the charge of making gods into the somewhat less comprehensive or radical phrase, "making innovations concerning the divine things"(3b). And showing himself quite sympathetic to the philosopher, Euthyphro readily

dismisses the charges against Socrates on the grounds that the many, whom he disparages, are easily swayed by slander, as he himself has apparently experienced firsthand. At once, then, we become aware that Euthyphro considers himself to be something of a diviner, one who has a privileged relationship with the gods:

> And me too--whenever I say something in the assembly concerning the divine things, predicting for them what will be, they laugh at me as if I were mad. And yet, of the things I have foretold, I have spoken nothing that is not true. Nevertheless, they envy us all who are of this sort. But one should not give any thought to them, but should confront them. (3c)

So, Euthphro has spent time in the assembly speaking before the many, allegedly making divinely-inspired and thus accurate predictions concerning the future, but has only met with ridicule on those occasions.

In light of this common Athenian laughter, we are invited to consider whether his claim to supernatural power and divine favour are well founded. Although it seems more wishful than oracular, the one example of Euthyphro's predictive powers in this dialogue (his forecasting that Socrates' indictment will proceed as he has a mind for it to do; 3e) is ironically accurate; Socrates' trial *does* turn out as he wishes, if one agrees that he *chooses* to die for philosophy. [17] Nonetheless, we can be fairly certain that Euthyphro is wholly ignorant about the philosophic life, and understands himself to be predicting Socrates' acquittal.

Be that as it may, Euthyphro offers contradictory prescriptions concerning the kind of treatment he thinks the many, who laugh at him, are deserving of: on the one hand, he tells Socrates not to give them any thought; on the other hand, he insists that they be confronted with their ignorance. He is torn, it seems, between his desire to be loved by the gods, and the need to be honored by his fellow human beings for having a special standing with the gods (which he assumes most people secretly envy). Bringing a lawsuit against his father is--as will soon be revealed--one more way of getting recognition from the many for his piety.

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[17] This is a view widely accepted in the supporting literature. See, for example, West's "Introduction", *Four Texts on Socrates*, p. 23: "As Plato portrays it, Socrates' defence speech was a failure, but a deliberate failure. Plato's published *Apology of Socrates* turns that failure into enduring success. Ever since, Socrates has served as the model of the nobility and justice of philosophy."

But Socrates, who shows no surprise at Euthyphro's admission (evidence perhaps that Euthyphro already has somewhat of a reputation for such antics), seems to be laughing at Euthyphro too. "My dear Euthyphro," begins his reply. And "Dear," as Socrates uses it here, seems as much a mark of condescension as a term of genuine endearment. For instead of graciously accepting the support and sympathy Euthyphro has offered, Socrates chooses to correct him;

> ...being laughed at is perhaps no matter. For in fact the Athenians, as it seems to me, do not much care about someone whom they suppose to be clever, unless he is a skillful teacher of his own wisdom. But their spiritedness is aroused against anyone who they suppose makes others like himself, either from envy, as you say, or because of something else (3c-d).

According to Euthyphro, the many laugh at him because they are envious. Nevertheless, he seems unable to ignore their taunting. In fact, in his account of his trials at the hands of the assemblymen, he seems to portray himself as a sort of persecuted martyr. Socrates, on the other hand, implies that their *laughter* is harmless, thus suggesting that Euthyphro's suffering is more self-imposed than real. The implication is that, were Euthyphro truly a force to be reckoned with in the opinion of the Athenian people, they would do something more consequential than just laugh. The Athenians don't care much about "clever" people *per se*. Rather, it is *teaching*--making others like oneself, spreading one's peculiar "madness"--which seems to bother them.

Euthyphro, who thus far has only met with laughter in the assembly, assures Socrates that he has no desire to try out how the Athenians would be disposed toward him in regard to teaching his wisdom. But it seems unlikely that this is due to some desire on Euthyphro's part to keep the truth to himself, for his laughter-evoking speeches are rather like failed *attempts* at teaching. Socrates nonetheless continues to belabor the point;

> Perhaps *you* seem to make yourself available only infrequently and not to be willing to teach your own wisdom. But I fear that *I*, because of my philanthropy, seem to them to say profusely whatever I possess to every man, not only without pay, but even paying with pleasure if anyone is willing to listen to me (3d). [11]

He hereby tacitly suggests a formula for evading the wrath of the Athenians: stay away from other people and try to keep your wisdom to yourself. For, in his own case, he "fears"

[11]My emphasis.

(because of his "love of human beings") that he has incurred a reputation for saying profusely whatever he possesses to every man. And while he assures Euthyphro that he would not be troubled by the joking and laughing Euthyphro reports experiencing, Socrates concludes, "...if they are going to be serious, then how this will turn out is unclear except to you diviners"(3e). Implicit in his speculations is an explanation to account for the indictment against him; he is apparently "over-willing" to share his views with others, and his indictors seem especially angered by this peculiar form of "philanthropy". The "philanthropy" described here seems an exaggerated caricature. We believe that Socrates did not take payment for teaching (*Apology* 19d-e), but neither did he pay people to listen (as he jokingly suggests).

To repeat, a question at issue in this dialogue is Socrates' piety and its effect (perhaps corrupting) on others. By tradition, piety for Athenians consisted in worshipping the ancestral gods according to ancestral custom--praying and sacrificing to the gods and obeying the laws believed to be sanctioned by the gods. It would be one thing for Socrates not to believe in the city's gods, but quite another for him to spread, to teach by example, this disbelief through not *appearing* to be suitably pious and by openly taking issue with the state's authorized views in his conversations with others. [19] We may provisionally conclude that Socrates did not believe in the city's gods; he hints at this in the *Euthyphro* by expressing annoyance at the tales told about the gods, and saying that he does not believe they are true (6a-b). And in the *Republic* he treats such views as human-created stories, which may be reformed and improved. But according to Plato's portrayal of him, throughout the corpus, Socrates was a "pious" man to all outward appearances.

At the same time, he *is* accused of corrupting the young by successfully teaching his wisdom--including his wisdom about religious matters. That is, he is accused of being "philanthropic" with his non-belief, of proselytizing Athens' youth. One may suspect that where there is so much smoke, there may well be some fire. In the *Republic*, Socrates seems to speak freely concerning the gods and many other things, giving the impression that he will

[19] For my arguments regarding this point, I depend a great deal on Strauss' essay:

discuss whatever the young men wish to discuss. In the *Euthyphro*, on the other hand, despite the complete privacy of the conversation and the pertinence of the topic, Socrates rather conspicuously refrains from telling Euthyphro, the believer, exactly what he thinks of the stories of the gods. Socrates' approach, then, is noticeably different, according to whom he is speaking; the intelligent young men in the *Republic* are bright, spirited, imaginative, skeptical, and, most importantly, they exhibit a desire to know the truth. Euthyphro, on the other hand, seems to be a dull, self-absorbed, obtuse religious Know-it-all, whose self-praise about his knowledge of the divine things ironically shows that he has no real wonder in his soul. In contrast, then, to his explicit *claim* to an indiscriminate "philanthropy", Socrates' *behavior* shows that he does *not* say everything to every man. Here, as throughout the corpus, in order to do justice to each of his dialogic partners, Socrates treats each according to his own character and abilities.

Nonetheless, Socrates expresses the fear in the *Euthyphro* that his actions will not be judged as good, but villainous. And so it is in the wake of the foreboding of things to come in Socrates' trial, including Euthyphro's ironic prediction that the lawsuit will proceed as Socrates has a mind for it to, that they turn to Euthyphro's lawsuit. Socrates, who seemed less than eager to talk to Euthyphro at the beginning of the dialogue and who probably would rather be conversing in his usual haunts at Lyceum with some chosen companion, stays to speak with the dull Euthyphro, apparently for reasons other than his own pleasure. Thus the very circumstances of this dialogue serve to defend Socrates against the charge of corrupting the young through indiscriminate proselytizing. He seems to stay out of a sense of duty to Euthyphro and his family, but perhaps even more to Athens. He certainly does not try to enlighten Euthyphro on his true views on piety (although they may be otherwise manifested in the dialogue). Rather, he attempts to lead the young man back to something more akin to the traditional conception of piety. Even though it may be argued that his degree of success in this endeavour is left ambiguous, it can at least be said that Socrates attempts to defend traditional piety against the politically pernicious heterodoxy of Euthyphro.

III. Euthyphro's Lawsuit (3e-5a)

The salutary character of Socrates' effort becomes clearer as their conversation turns to a consideration of Euthyphro's case. The "diviner" relates a bizarre tale: he intends to prosecute his own father for allegedly murdering a hired man, who was himself guilty of murdering a family servant. The young man as much as admits that his action represents a pronounced departure from Athenian orthodoxy; in contradistinction to the views of his family and the many other Athenians who hold that father-punishing is impious, Euthyphro professes a superior wisdom concerning the divine things and how they are disposed with regard to the pious and the impious.

This strange twist in the dialogue begins innocently enough. As reciprocal politeness would require, Socrates now inquires into the details of Euthyphro's lawsuit. Euthyphro's account of himself seems cryptic, for at first he allows only that he is prosecuting "someone whom in prosecuting I again seem mad"(4a). His reactions to his experience in the assembly seems to suggests that Euthyphro does not believe that appearing to be mad to the many is necessarily a bad thing; rather, he even seems to take a kind of perverse pride in the apparent insanity of his case, capitalizing on this as one more respect whereby to distinguish himself from the many. But Socrates shows himself to be more puzzled than impressed by Euthyphro's provocative admission. He laughingly suggests that Euthyphro is perhaps prosecuting someone who flies. The word "prosecute" (*diokein*) literally means to 'pursue', to 'chase' or to 'hunt'; thus Socrates is playfully suggesting that Euthyphro appears mad because he thinks he can pursue someone who flies--and a human being who thought he could catch something that flies (like a bird or a god) would, after all, be mad. Missing the joke entirely, Euthyphro takes Socrates' teasing literally: "He is far from flying; in fact, he happens to be quite old"(4a). The diviner simply associates "pursuing" with speed, noting that his father's age makes him slow and hence an easy target at least so far as that is a concern. This notable lack of any sense of humour and his apparent inability to take language beyond its literal meaning, are recurrent features in Euthyphro's contributions in the dialogue; he takes everything Socrates says quite literally and seriously, from the philosopher's praise of the

indictor who actually wants to have him put to death, to his flattering request that Euthyphro become his "teacher"(5a). And, as Socrates will soon have him bear witness, Euthyphro even takes the stories of the gods, word for word, as the plain and simple truth (6b-c). It seems that his humourlessness, his "fundamentalistic" adherence to the poetic accounts of the gods, and his fanaticism go together.

Socrates is shocked to discover that Euthyphro is prosecuting his father. He appears to stand with the many in support of the orthodox view that it is impious to punish one's father. In this, the Platonic dialogue on piety, the supposed "expert" on piety (whom Socrates is about to engage as his "teacher") is brazenly committing an impious act--at least according to convention, and perhaps also according to nature. Moreover, the crime that Euthyphro is accusing his father of committing--murder--is punishable by death; Euthyphro wants to punish his father in the most severe way possible. Socrates swears by the name of the amazing Heracles, the most famous of the Greek heroes, a son of Zeus who was known for his courage, strength, and endurance. [20]

> Heracles! Surely the many, Euthyphro, are ignorant of what way is correct. For I don't suppose that it is the part of just anyone to do this correctly, but of one who is no doubt already far advanced in wisdom (4a-b).

But Euthyphro is unperturbed by the almost unanimous opposition he faces; instead, he seems to be flattered by what Socrates has said. In his typical literal-minded way, he asserts that the many are indeed ignorant of what way is correct. Euthyphro's confidence leads Socrates to suppose that Euthyphro may be embroiled in a complicated in-family murder, some extraordinary kind of tragic situation such as might justify such an unconventional course of

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[20] See the entries "Heracles" and "Amphitryon" in *Oxford Companion to Classical Literature* , compiled by Sir Paul Harvey, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 25, 203-4. To speak the name of Heracles thus would serve to show amazement, for Heracles truly was an amazing hero, known for the twelve legendary labours he performed. But more appropriate to the context in which Socrates uses his name is the "madness"of Heracles, which is variously related in legends and in a play by Euripides. Zeus takes the form of Alcmene's husband, Amphitryon, and they produce the son Heracles, twin brother to Iphicles, said to be the actual offspring of Amphitryon. Hera, wife of Zeus, is angered and makes it her task to torment Heracles. She puts in his cradle two serpents, which he kills. Later in life, she causes him to go mad and kill his own wife, Megara, and their children. The use of "Heracles" is fitting then because it seems that Euthyphro, like Heracles, has gone mad, for he plainly wishes to kill his own father.

action. For murder trials were usually initiated by the *victim's* family, certainly not the murderer's. [21] Thus, Socrates presumes that Euthyphro's father has murdered one of his siblings, or (even worse) perhaps he has killed Euthyphro's mother--both complicated situations which would seem to call for the wisest counsel. Euthyphro ridicules Socrates' attempt to explain away his apparent impiety:

> It's laughable, Socrates, that you suppose that it makes any difference whether the dead man is an outsider or of the family, rather than that one should be on guard only for whether the killer killed with justice or not; and if it was with justice to let it go, but if not, to proceed against him...(4b).

His supposedly superior conception of what is correct places no importance whatsoever on one's relationship to the victim, but is based solely on what is just: if the killer killed without justice, one should proceed against him, regardless of all other considerations. [22] Nonetheless, his ostensibly high-principled conception of justice appears both simplistic and rigid; he seems oblivious to the possibility that a correct conception of justice might require that judgements be based, at least to some extent, on the relationship between the persons involved: that a son perhaps owes a father more than he does a stranger.

This is the first reference to justice in the dialogue, and it occurs before "piety" (injustice having already been mentioned; cf. 3a). Euthyphro doesn't expressly refer to "piety" in this, his explanation of the circumstances which led him to prosecute his own father, even though he accounts for his superiority to the many in terms of his knowledge of the divine. [23] Nonetheless, he says that his ultimate aim is to prevent the religious pollution caused by sharing one's hearth and table with a murderer, for "..the pollution turns out to be equal if you knowingly associate with such a man and do not purify yourself, as well as him, by proceeding against him in a lawsuit"(4b-c). His justice is apparently for the sake of purifying (*aphosion*) himself; as the words imply, this "purity" is closely linked to the

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[21] Douglas M. MacDowell, *Athenian Homicide Law in the Age of the Orators*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1963), p.1-2.

[22] Those who were categorized as having killed with justice, according to the standards of the time, included those who killed in self-defence or by accident, and those who killed adulterers; see *Plato's Euthyphro*, with introduction and notes by Ian Walker, (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1984), p.55.

[23] Before the dialogue is over, Socrates will exploit Euthyphro's identification here of the pious with the just (cf.11e-16a).

"pious" (*hosion*). Now, according to traditional Greek belief, murder brought about personal injury to the victim's family and caused religious pollution or uncleanness for the whole city, but especially for those who consorted with the murderer. [24] It was because of its religious ramifications that the King, whom Euthyphro is now approaching with the matter, had jurisdiction in murder cases. [25] Euthyphro, it seems, takes special pride in his preparedness to punish even one of his own family for the sake of attaining religious purity, thereby stressing the rigor of his piety.

He elaborates, giving an account of the circumstances of his father's alleged crime. There is not one death involved, but two, and, as Euthyphro proceeds to relate the events to Socrates, it becomes apparent that his father's guilt is dubious, to say the least.

> Now the man who died was a laborer of mine, and when we were farming on Naxos, he was serving us there for hire. So in a drunken fit he gets angry with one of the family servants and cuts his throat. So my father, binding his feet and hands together and throwing him into a ditch, sends a man here to ask the exegete what he should do. During this time he paid little attention to the man he had bound and was careless of him, on the ground that he was a murderer and it was no matter even if he should die, which is just what happened to him. For because of hunger and cold and his bonds, he died before the messenger returns from the exegete (4d).

There are a number of puzzling features in Euthyphro's account. The setting of the crime, for instance, presents some technical difficulties both with regard to the Athenian judicial system and with respect to the time frame of the dialogue. The murder did not take place in or around Athens, rather it took place on Naxos, an Island colony of Athens. It was one of a group of islands, the Cyclades, which, because they revolted against the Athenian league in 473 B.C. were colonized by the Athenians.[26] Subsequently, Naxos was lost as a colony during the Peloponnesian war in the year 404 B.C. The setting of the crime presents a major plot complication; *Euthyphro* takes place just prior to the trial of Socrates, in 399 B.C. If Euthyphro's family lost their land (and the farm where the "murder" took place) in the war against the Spartans five years earlier, why has Euthyphro waited so long to prosecute? Perhaps, however, Euthyphro's family did not lose their land and they continued to farm even after the Athenians lost power, allowing for the possibility that the "murder" took place

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[24] Douglas M. MacDowell, *Athenian Homicide Law in the Age of the Orators*, p.3.
[25] See *Four Texts on Socrates*, translated by West p.44, note #14.
[26] See *Plato's Euthyphro*, introduction and notes by Ian Walker, p.56.

quite recently. On the other hand, Plato may be using a deliberate anachronism to indicate the fictional nature both of Euthyphro's story and the dialogue.

Another explanaton is that the proceedings have simply been delayed, for Euthyphro spends his time in Athens--Socrates knows him, or at least has heard of him--and the young man does refer to the family's farming in Naxos in the past tense. In this case, the delay in proceedings might be accounted for as result of family opposition (cf. 4d-e); perhaps, having fought the opposition of his family long and hard, having perhaps considered the matter in the assembly--with no agreement on all fronts--he has finally decided to bring the matter to trial.

Alternatively, Euthyphro is perhaps using this lawsuit to exact revenge on his father for some supposed injury to himself. Euthyphro's story does convey some confusion as to the man's relation to the family. At first, Euthyphro describes him as "a labourer of *mine*" (thus not a slave, and not of the household) [27]--as though the man was a worker in Euthyphro's own personal *employ*. But, then he says that "...he was serving *us* there [in Naxos] *for hire*...(4c), [28] as though the labourer was under the authority of the whole family, and most significantly, Euthyphro's father. So there seems to be some discrepancy over who--Euthyphro or his father--actually had authority over the man. The struggle over authority is a problem which regularly complicates father-son relationships, and traditionally calls for sons to be respectful toward fathers. So Euthyphro may be bringing this case out of envy or resentment, his presumed authority over the labourer pre-empted by his father, who chose to deal with the man in a particularly severe manner. Also, it might have happened when Euthyphro was himself "under-age" for bringing a suit against anyone. [29]

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[27] My emphasis.

[28] My emphasis.

[29] cf. 8d; Socrates here establishes that, in court, the Athenians don't ponder theoretical questions of justice, rather, they dispute the details of the crime--the who, the what, the when. The sketchiness of Euthyphro's account, its failure to give a truly accurate picture of the details of this case, makes it difficult to judge the merits of it. But the very fact that the father is *not clearly* in the wrong is sufficient to put Euthyphro's proceeding in a bad light.

Euthyphro does not elaborate on certain parts of the story. Most notable is the fact that Euthyphro also permitted the "murder" to take place--he was also in Naxos at the time and might have provided food and protection to the victim, even if he been only a child when the incident occurred. Moreover, he does not attempt any defence of his father's alleged victim, though the man's drunkenness might mitigate his guilt in relation to the first killing. Nor does he argue that there were no eyewitnesses to the first killing, or any other possible defence. He in no way raises the slightest doubt about the labourer's guilt. For him, apparently, killing a murderer is no less a crime than killing an innocent man.

The outcome of Euthyphro's story is also sketchy. He relates that the man died before the messenger returned from the exegete (the authorized religious interpreter), thus implying that the exegete's word should have some bearing on his father's course of action. But he gives no inkling of what that official recommended, if anything. And if indeed the exegete had pronounced that an alternate course of action was to be followed, Euthyphro does not use it as evidence to support his own case; rather, he remains silent on this point. The exegetes were Apollonian priests who had more of an expounding function that an advisory one. They prescribed the rituals and customs to be carried out in the event of a murder and gave advice on the law only on special request, since interpretation of the law was in the jurisdiction of the courts. [30] So it is likely that Euthyphro's father sent for the interpreter not to tell him what to do with the murderer, but to tell which rites of purification should be undertaken.

Moreover, it remains the case that the Athenian authorities, religious or otherwise, have apparently taken no steps to reprimand Euthyphro's father. This seems to suggest that the state (as well as Euthyphro's family; cf.4d-e) is in accordance with what the elder man has done, and that Euthyphro alone is in disagreement with the accepted views on these things. Furthermore, "murder" was not considered by the Athenians to be a crime against the state, but rather a matter of personal injury to the dead man's family. Inasmuch as a

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[30] Marlo Lewis Jr., "An Interpretation of the *Euthyphro* ", *Interpretation, A Journal of Political Philosophy*, 12-2,3 (1984), p.247; and Douglas M. MacDowell, *Athenian Homicide Law in the Age of the Orators*, p. 11-18.

household servant is regarded as part of the family, Euthyphro's father was justified in his administration of summary justice. Whereas the hired man not being a member of Euthyphro's family, there is also no *legal* provision for him to attempt to prosecute his father of this man's behalf. [31]

No wonder, then, that Euthyphro's family is indignant about his plan to prosecute the head of the family, and that they have appealed to him with a coherent sequence of arguments which reflect the standard conception of familial piety. He describes the rest of his family's demeanor as "indignant" (which is hardly surprising). They think it wrong for a son to proceed against a father for murder, especially when he is doing so on behalf of a man who is himself murderer. They are vehemently defensive of the father, and claim that he didn't even kill the man. But they also assert that even if what he did can be construed as killing, it would be of no concern since the man who died was a murderer anyway (and so far from being worth defending, was actually deserving of death; 4d-e). Perhaps in a more clear-cut case of a major transgression by the father, they might have been more sympathetic to Euthyphro's views (as we can imagine had the victim been, for example, a member of their own family, and killed in cold blood). But in the case Euthyphro relates, they see no difficulty in standing by the traditional view that it is simply impious for a son to prosecute his father.

Euthyphro brushes all of their arguments aside in one fell swoop, taking issue only with the last, their plea concerning impiety, claiming that they know badly how the divine is disposed concerning the pious and the impious. Now, Socrates--who so far has played the part of a repentant "criminal", one who attributes any guilt he might bear to ignorance about piety--makes no immediate attempt to assert the orthodox view of piety by defending Euthyphro's father's actions to his son, despite his surprise at hearing about Euthyphro's lawsuit. Instead, he engages Euthyphro to become his teacher.

As we have already noted, Euthyphro fancies himself as a diviner, and has been in no way daunted by the fact that his pronouncements have brought only derision in the Athenian

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[31] R.E. Allen, *Plato's "Euthyphro" and the Earlier Theory of the Forms*, (New York: Humanities Press, 1970), p.20-21.

Assembly. Now, his account of the lawsuit, despite its sketchiness, provides more substantial evidence about Euthyphro himself. And the more we learn of him, the more bizarre he seems. He justifies his conventionally impious attack on his father with the bold claim that he, unlike the many, has wisdom with regard to the divine, and knows well the pious and the impious. We are provided no explanation (at least, not overtly) of how Euthyphro acquired his strange religious views, which his father and the rest of his family clearly do not share. The young man's scarcely credible claim to have wisdom with regard to the divine ill-prepares the reader for the proposal that Socrates puts to him at this point in the dialogue: the bizarre diviner is to become the philosopher's "teacher".

IV. Euthyphro Teaches the Pious:

Doing What the Gods Do (5a-6e)

So at this turning point in the dialogue, with some final reassurances from Euthyphro that he does indeed have precise knowledge regarding these things, Socrates ironically asks to become the man's "student". His announced intention, it seems, is to learn the *divine things* from Euthyphro (cf.4e, 5a), but it is a definition of the *pious* that is in fact requested as the lesson actually commences. Euthyphro's definition, the first in a series of flawed attempts, takes the form of a proof--one allegedly given to others as well--that his intended actions are pious. This great proof rests on the traditional belief that Zeus, "the best and most just of the gods," also punished his father (i.e., Kronos, who in turn had earlier punished *his* father Ouranus). Socrates rejects the definition on the grounds that it merely cites an example of (allegedly) pious action, but does not express the one *idea* of the pious, in light of which one could recogize all pious acts to be such. So teacher and student turn to another definition of the pious, leaving the reader to consider the definition which is left implicit in Euthyphro's argument: that piety involves doing what the gods do. And it *is* worth considering.

They begin this first attempt with reassurance from Euthyphro that he has precise knowledge regarding the pious, and this apparently prompts Socrates to ask to become Euthyphro's "student".

> Then, wondrous Euthyphro, wouldn't it be best for me to become your student and, before Meletus' indictment comes to trial, to challenge him on these very things? I would say that even in time past I regarded it as important to know the divine things, and now, since he asserts that I am doing wrong by acting unadvisedly and making innovations concerning the divine things, I have become your student. "And, Meletus," I would say, "if you agree that Euthyphro is wise in such things, then hold that I too believe correctly and drop the lawsuit. But if not, then bring a lawsuit against him, my teacher, instead of me, on the ground that he is corrupting the old, me and his own father, by teaching me and by admonishing and punishing him." And if he isn't persuaded by me and doesn't give up the lawsuit or indict you instead of me, shouldn't I say in the law court these very things on which I challenged him? (5a-b).

Socrates, presumably on the basis of their short conversation thus far, suggests that it might be best for him to become the student of this "wondrous" man--wondrous, perhaps because he occupies himself in a consideration of "wondrous" divine things, or because his apparently reckless confidence in his alleged wisdom is something to be "wondered" at. In

other dialogues, we witness fathers being quizzed at length by Socrates with regard to the teachers they choose for their sons, and sometimes the sons or teachers themselves (*Theages*, *Apology*, *Protagoras*). Here, he seems decidedly lax in his scrutiny of Euthyphro's credentials.

There is no aspect of Euthyphro's character, thinking, or action displayed thus far that would seem to recommend him as a credible teacher. In fact, that he is denominated a diviner would rather negate the possibility of his being a teacher--the diviner's "skill" is in declaring, not educating (i.e., explaining in terms of rational principles). Besides which, most people laugh at his divination; so he is not well-reputed as diviners go. The sheer fact that his intended prosecution of his father violates the common sense notion of piety would seem to make him an especially problematic leader for someone already accused of religious heterodoxy (to say the least!). Moreover, the only evidence we have seen so far to support Euthyphro's contention that he is wise is his own boasting.

It appears that Socrates' plea for tuition is ironic, but to what end is not altogether clear. His stated purpose, what he hopes to gain by this enterprise, is both exaggerated and fantastical, for he says he hopes that Meletus will be so impressed by the re-educated philosopher that he will drop the indictment. But in actual fact, it was the philosopher's willingness to inquire into the divine things in the first place, questioning and becoming annoyed at the traditional stories told about the gods, which brought the present troubles upon him (cf. 6a-b; *Apology* 18b, 19b, 23d; also *Republic*, 377d-386a). Traditional Athenian piety--the view of piety Meletus believes himself to be defending--requires following the pious laws and believing in the traditional gods. There is no law commanding human beings to *inquire* into the divine things (rather than simply accept the traditional view); so Socrates will not be advancing his own reputation for piety by engaging a "teacher" to help him do this, nor will he likely garner favour where Meletus is concerned.

Veiled behind Socrates' proposal is the implicit juxtaposing of his own indictment for impiety by the young Meletus with the young Euthyphro's apparently impious prosecution of his father. For, notice, part of Socrates' announced plan in the event that Meletus does not approve of the philosopher's re-education is that Euthyphro, his teacher, should be held

accountable, not only for corrupting Socrates, but for admonishing and punishing his own father as well. So if Euthyphro cannot defend his teaching of Socrates to Meletus, if he cannot teach Socrates what the divine (and derivatively, the pious) are, he will not be able to defend his own actions (cf. 8b, 9a-b, 15d-e). Here is perhaps the actual reason that Socrates wishes to become Euthyphro's "student"; even before hearing the young man's "lesson" in the divine, Socrates seems sure that Euthyphro is acting unwisely. If then he hopes to accomplish anything good through his consultation with Euthyphro, it is perhaps to prevent this impious lawsuit from taking place. Clearly the diviner has nothing to teach either Meletus or the Athenian people (much less Socrates)--nothing, at least, which they would be willing to take seriously. Socrates ironically suggests that if Meletus should reject his proposal, the failed challenge could be used as evidence in his defence in the law court. There is a paradoxical truth inherent in this scheme, however: if Socrates were indeed to adopt the ways of Euthyphro in court, he might actually escape punishment, for people would naturally be inclined to laugh at him as they do at Euthyphro.

Socrates seems to be encouraging in Euthyphro a rivalry towards Meletus over which of the two knows the divine and pious things best. As noted, Euthyphro's lawsuit and Meletus' indictment bear striking ressemblances to one another. But although parallels can be drawn between Euthyphro and Meletus, Socrates also suggests that Euthyphro be his own (Socrates') substitute in the event that his re-education does not meet with Meletus' approval. This tacitly raises the question, who deserves most to be prosecuted for impiety--Socrates or Euthyphro? Both, according to Euthyphro, are mavericks with respect to the divine; but despite the laughing tone with which Socrates proposes the current arrangement to Euthyphro, the philosopher may be subtly suggesting that Meletus should be prosecuting the likes of the unorthodox Euthyphro rather than the innovative Socrates. Whereas Euthyphro's deeds have thus far been unnoticed by Meletus (as compared to Socrates whom he sharply discerns; 5c), his impiety is about to be exposed, if only in the private company of a fellow "diviner". And given the clear parallels between Euthyphro and Meletus, the latter's own piety is called into question.

Euthyphro, utterly oblivious to Socrates' irony, allows his "student" to orchestrate the progress of the lesson, giving the impression that the diviner is like some resource to be tapped, but who has no active pedagogic power of his own. [32] Socrates begins his education in the "divine things" by requesting to be taught the pious; in fact, defining the pious seems to be the sole undertaking of their inquiry. But this tacitly raises for consideration the problem of the relationship between the pious and the divine. As the "lesson" progresses, Euthyphro's flawed definitions of the pious show themselves to be intricately linked to his conception of the divine powers. Nonetheless, Socrates refrains from directly requesting a lesson in the "divine" things:

> So tell me now, before Zeus, what you just now strongly affirmed that you know plainly: what sort of things do you say the reverent [*eusebes*] and the irreverent [*asebes*] are, concerning murder and concerning other things? Or isn't the pious [*hosion*] itself the same as itself in every action, and again, isn't the impious [*anhosion*] opposite to everything pious [*hosion*], while it itself is similar to itself and has one certain *idea* in accordance with irreverence [*asebeia*]--everything, that is, that is going to be irreverent [*asebes*]? (5c-d). [33]

Notice, Socrates *seems* to employ two sets of terms more or less indifferently by way of signifying the phenomenon of piety, speaking of *eusebes* and *asebes* interchangeably with *hosion* and *anhosion* (4e). Although the two root words, *eusebes* and *hosion*, are close in meaning, it is highly unlikely that Socrates--who throughout the Platonic corpus gives so much care to the precise meanings (in contrast to the normal usage) of words--would randomly interchange these terms here in the *Euthyphro*. [34] Whatever Socrates means by

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[32] Euthyphro, if he is indeed a diviner, is rather like those described in *Apology*; diviners and those who deliver oracles speak many beautiful things--as do the poets--but know nothing of what they speak. (the *Apology*, 22b-c.)

[33] Diverging from West's translation, all references to the Greek *eusebes*, have been translated as "reverence", rather than "piety". See the following footnote.

[34] *Eusebes* and cognates are used much less frequently in the text, and for this reason demand special scrutiny. See West p.46., note 18. There seems to be some disagreement amongst translators regarding how the two words for "piety" are to be translated into English. Some prefer to translate *hosion* as "holy" while reserving "pious" for *eusebes*; others object that "holy" with all of its modern connotations does not accurately represent the meaning of *hosion*. West, whose translation is being used here, prefers to leave both in the form of "pious" and its cognates, while noting the odd instance of *eusebes*. This, however, seems to encourage the view that they are indeed interchangeable words, like "couch" and "sofa" for example. In this essay, all references to *eusebes* will be carefully and separately considered, since the instances of their usage may offer an understanding of the pious not obviously exposed on the surface of the dialogue. West explains that the

introducing *eusebes* and cognates into the conversation, Euthyphro appears to attach no special significance to it; neither does Socrates insist that Euthyphro give *separate* definitions for the reverent and the pious.

He asks that the pious and the impious be defined in terms of the "ideas" which rule them, postulating that they themselves are similar to themselves and have one certain idea in accordance with the pious/impious (5d). Euthyphro responds obligingly with the first of three "definitions" he will submit to Socrates' scrutiny; unlike the others, this first one seems to be relatively free of Socrates' influence, for it is intrinsic to that "great...proof" that Euthyphro has already told other people (5e). In fact, his answer may be an example of the same laughable speech-making that Euthyphro displays at the assembly (cf.3b-c). At first, it seems to be merely a recapitulation of the reasons he gave for disagreeing with his family; piety is simply punishing all those who do wrong or injustice (cf. 4b-c):

> I say, then, that the pious is just what I am doing now: to proceed against whoever does injustice regarding murders or thefts of sacred [*hieron*] things, or is doing wrong in any other such thing, whether he happens to be a father or mother or anyone else at all; and not to proceed against him is impious. Now contemplate, Socrates, how great a proof I will tell you that the law [*nomos*] is so disposed--a proof, which I have already told to others as well, that these things would be correctly done if they take place in this way--that one is not to give way to the irreverent one, whoever he happens to be. Human beings themselves believe [*nomizontes*] that Zeus is the best and most just of the gods, at the same time that they agree that he bound his own father because he gulped down his sons without justice, and that the latter, in turn, castrated his own father because of other such things. Yet they are angry at me because I am proceeding against my father when he has done injustice, and so they contradict themselves both concerning the gods and concerning me (5d-6a). [35]

To begin with, Euthyphro argues that he has the "law" (*nomos*) on his side, and it is so disposed that doing things correctly would entail not giving way to the irreverent (*asebes*) one, whoever he happens to be. He seems to be referring to the laws of the city, and it is in accordance with their commonly held beliefs (*nomizontes*) that he chastises other human beings for inconsistency in not adhering to the law. In particular, he criticizes them for contradicting themselves in that they recognize the greatness and the great deeds of the

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[34](cont'd) two terms are similar in meaning but that *eusebes* "...emphasizes the reverence and respect, even fear, which one feels or ought to feel toward the gods. From this point forward, all instances of *eusebes* and *asebes* will be expressed as "reverent" as opposed to "pious".

[35]Once again diverging from West's translation, I have translated the Greek *eusebes* and cognates as "reverence" and will continue to do so throughout the text.

gods--Zeus in particular--but do not applaud the same deeds when performed by human beings. Underlying Euthyphro's argument is the assumption that it is correct and pious for human beings to do what the gods do. And it should be noted that he here treats *contradiction*--i.e., that which is fundamental to all reasoning--as directly pertinent to a correct understanding of these matters. Also, he introduces a fourth religious conception, the *sacred (hieron)*; how it relates to the *divine (theion)*, the *pious (hosion)*, and the *reverent (eusebes)* remains to be clarified.

The particular stories of the gods that Euthyphro is referring to seem to be derived from Hesiod's popular account of the origins of the gods, *Theogony*. [36] This poet sings of Ouranos(Heaven) and Gaia(Earth), that at the birth of their off-spring, as each is born, Ouranos pushes it back into the earth (155-158, *Theogony*). The youngest child, the devious devising Kronos, most terrible of Gaia's children (136-137), is persuaded by her to castrate his father as punishment for the brutal treatment of his sons and for being the first to think of shameful dealings (164-166); he accepts her rationalization and obliges. Afterwards, the angry Ouranos dubs his sons the "Titans" (stretchers) because they stretched their powers outrageously and accomplished a monstrous thing, and prophesizes that they will be punished for it (208-210).

Kronos' punishment comes, and fittingly it is at the hands of his own son, Zeus. It had been ordained that Kronos would be beaten by his sons (464-465), so he swallows each of his children by Rheia as they are born. Before Zeus is born, however, Rheia hides him under the earth (453-484), fooling Kronos into swallowing a stone instead (which he later brings up with the rest of his progeny). Subsequently, Zeus leads the Olympian gods, all the sons of Kronos, in a victorious war against the Titans, at the end of which he becomes king over immortals (884), while the Titans (including Kronos) are imprisoned below the earth (715-725).

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[36] The story in question can also be found in Aeschylus and Pindar, but Hesiod's is the earliest account. See "Theogony" in *Hesiod*, translated by Richmond Lattimore, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1959).

Euthyphro's account varies from the one given by Hesiod--the best known and commonly accepted poetic account--in one very important respect: most of it centres on the fact that Zeus (and Kronos) punished their fathers for doing *injustice*. But according to Hesiod, Kronos simply acted on his mother's command, and Zeus offers no justification whatsoever for his deeds. Notice as well, Kronos and Zeus' actions are not disinterestedly punitive, but entail a degree of personal revenge for personal injury suffered by themselves and their siblings; they were directly assaulted by their fathers, fathers who tried to prevent them even from being born, whereas Euthyphro is punishing his father supposedly for something he did to another, and professes to be doing so in the name of some transcendent notion of piety. By his choice of this particular example, he may unconsciously reveal something about his relationship with his own father; perhaps he too is trying to pay his father back for some perceived personal injury.

Without scrutinizing the assumptions implicit in Euthyphro's "proof" that he is acting piously, Socrates responds directly to the substance of this poetic account and its implications for his own indictment. He acknowledges a habitual tendency to become annoyed when he hears the kinds of stories about the gods which Euthyphro has just referred to, and suggests that possibly it is this behavior which has caused men to wish to indict him. Implicit in Socrates' dramatic aside to his "teacher's" lesson is an admission that he is in fact guilty of what his indictors suspect him of, i.e., that he does not believe in the gods that Euthyphro and the rest of the Athenians believe in. For it would be sophistical to say that Socrates believes in the *Athenian* gods, but disagrees with the *Athenians* concerning what these gods do, that is, what tales about them are correct.

However, rather than being annoyed with Euthyphro, as he admits he typically is with all such storytellers, Socrates--in an apparently conciliatory manner--pledges to concede his teacher's authority in these matters:

> So now, if these things seem so to you too, who know well about these things, it is certainly necessary, as is likely, for us to concede them as well. For what else shall we say, since we ourselves also agree that we know nothing about them? But tell me, before the god of friendship, do you truly hold that these things have happened in this way? (6a-b).

Socrates' apparent willingness to give in to these things simply because they come from the mouth of Euthyphro is somewhat astonishing when compared to his treatment of such accounts in the *Republic*. There, in outlining the proper education the young should have in the just city in speech, Socrates makes radical changes in the types of tales told about the gods in order to render them fit to tell the young (*Republic* 377d-392a). Ironically, in that dialogue he also selects as his first example Hesiod's story of Zeus and Kronos (*Republic* 377e-378a). There he recommends against telling this story on the very grounds that if the young heard it, they might think they do nothing to be wondered at in doing the extremes of injustice or punishing the unjust deeds of their fathers in every way, but only to be doing what the first and greatest of the gods did (*Republic* 378b). Thus, the exact things Socrates condemns and dismisses in the *Republic*, he apparently accepts at the outset of the investigation of piety portrayed in the *Euthyphro*.

Socrates' concession, however, must be buttressed by further assurance from Euthyphro; with the god of friendship as his witness, Socrates asks Euthyphro, "... do you truly hold that these things have happened in this way?" (6b). Euthyphro affirms under oath that he holds these things to be true. Of all the gods, Zeus, the god of friendship, is probably the best guarantor of Euthyphro's honesty, not only because the diviner seems to esteem this divinity above the others (cf. 5e), but because he considers Socrates to be a "friend", a fellow diviner of sorts. In fact, Euthyphro not only holds these things are true, but even more wondrous things which the many do not know (6b), and which he offers to share with Socrates. Postponing for some other time an exposition of Euthyphro's "private" and wondrous knowledge, Socrates seems the more eager to establish the particulars of the diviner's views concerning other commonly held beliefs, the kind of beliefs which (again, according to evidence elsewhere in the corpus) Socrates also receives with annoyance:

> And do you hold that there really is war among the gods against one another, and terrible enmities and battles, and many other such things as are spoken of by the poets and with which our sacred things are adorned by the good painters, particularly the robe filled with such adornments which is brought up to the Acropolis in the Great Panathenaea? Shall we assert that these things are true, Euthyphro? (6b-c).

Once again, these matters show an uncanny correspondence to those he rejects in *Republic*.

Central to his concern is the common belief, a belief which Euthyphro shares, that the gods are enemies to each other and are in state of war. In *Republic*, Socrates says that, above all, such things cannot be taught if those guarding the city are to think it shameful to be angry with one another (*Republic* 377e-378c). Likewise, the adorned robe taken to the Acropolis during the festival of the Panathenaea which bears a design depicting the story of the battle between the Olympian gods and the Titans, is also to be banned from the city in speech outlined in the *Republic* (*Republic* 378c). But Euthyphro's belief goes beyond the popular poetic account represented in the sacred paraphernalia of Athens, for as he declares once again, "Not only these, Socrates, but as I said just now, I will also explain many other things to you, if you wish, about the divine things [*theion*]; and when you hear them, I know well that you will be astounded"(6c). Socrates does not wonder at Euthyphro's willingness to tell these stories, but chooses, once again, to postpone the opportunity for "some other time", when they are at leisure. [37]

So without further scrutinizing the Athenian account of the gods, Socrates turns back to their consideration of the definition of piety, but not in order to consider the conception of piety implicit in what Euthyphro said. Rather, he flatly rejects it on the basis of its form; it is not a general definition: "...you did not teach me sufficiently earlier, comrade, when I asked what ever [sic] the pious is. Instead you told me that what you are now doing, proceeding against your father for murder, happens to be pious" (6c-d).

Euthyphro has built into his definition a defence of his own behavior and, perhaps partly as a result of that, Socrates--ostensibly because he had asked to be shown the "idea" of the pious (5d)--rejects this definition. Euthyphro counters, however, that not only his behaviour in this case is pious, but many other "things" as well (6d), and presumably he believes that he can give comparable "proofs" for each of them. But Socrates is relentless in his apparent desire to learn the very *eidos* (form) of the pious from Euthyphro; and as though to avoid any further confusion, he clarifies what he means: "Do you remember that I didn't bid you to teach me some one or two of the many pious things, but the *eidos* itself, by

[37] Euthyphro uses these same words--"some other time"--at the close of the dialogue to evade a further search for the meaning of piety.

which all the pious things are pious? For surely you were saying that it is by one *idea* [West's emphasis] that the impious things are impious and the pious things pious" (6d-e). He challenges Euthyphro to teach him what this idea is so that by comparing it to the things Euthyphro or anyone else might do, he might see which of them is pious (6e). The young diviner is obligingly compliant, for at this point he has yet to be flustered by Socrates' arguments and is fresh to follow the trail of his "pupil's" doggedly precise requirements. He replies, " If this is the way that you wish, Socrates, I'll tell you in this way too" (6e). For Euthyphro, the rejection of his definition represents not a failing in his own wisdom, but perhaps a peculiarity of his listener for which he is generously willing to compensate. Persuasion is not required: he neither defends the original definition nor questions the renewed specifications Socrates has put forth. It is worthy of note that Socrates employs *eidos* in conjunction with *idea* to describe the nature of the formal definition he seeks. This leaves the impression that *idea* is synonymous with *eidos*, and almost surely Euthyphro considers them to be so. While Socrates does appear to use the terms interchangably here as throughout the corpus, more careful comparison of his usage suggests that *idea* tends to be reserved for a mental conception of something, whereas *eidos* (form) has the special significance of being associated with the *beings* themselves. This distinction may have important implications for an understanding of both piety and the divine things: to say that there is one *idea* in accordance with all the pious things does not necessarily mean that there is some existing form of the pious, some divine ruling entity of which all pious things partake. Rather, it may be the case that piety as such is some conception existing only in the minds of men, and its adequacy is to be judged, not by its correspondence to a form, but by some other standard, e.g., whether or not it facilitates cohesion in families and cities.

Symptomatic of his apparent "indifference" to the kind of wisdom Socrates wishes to pursue (that is, knowledge about forms or ideas, philosophic wisdom), Euthyphro--who evidently would prefer to be telling wondrous tales about the gods--relinquishes his first definition without a struggle. But the "proof" he has touted as the truth about piety, here and on past occasions, seems to have certain features which call for further examination by

Plato's reader, features which seem to distinguish Euthyphro's conception of piety from that of the many. To be specific, Euthyphro's "proof" suggests that piety involves imitating the gods, or doing what they do. Now if we examine the conventional view of piety--as witnessed by Euthyphro's family and supported by the many--we find that human beings worship the gods according to ancestral custom because they believe ancestral custom to be divinely instituted. Therefore, piety according to traditional belief is doing what the gods *tell* one to do. So Euthyphro deviates from the traditional view insofar as he tries *to be like the gods* instead of obeying the code of behavior they have supposedly prescribed to *human beings*. [31]

Euthyphro's belief diverges significantly from the traditional Greek understanding of the relationship between gods and men. Men are mortal and therefore by definition are inferior to gods. Traditional Greek mythology includes several tragic accounts of men who, in trying to be godlike, suffered or are punished for it. Tantalus, for example, (who is referred to in this dialogue; 11e), having eaten the gods' food in order to become immortal, is tragically punished by being eternally "tantalized" by food placed just beyond his reach. Several Greek tragedies also pursue the theme of human downfall brought about when men attempt godlike actions, such as incest or patricide. In this tradition, gods are not notable for their modesty, though this trait is greatly honored in human beings. It is not his unorthodox beliefs about the gods, then, but his unorthodox conception of the pious--imitating the gods rather than obeying--which leads Euthyphro to punish his father, an immodest and shameless act by human standards.

Euthyphro tries to get closer to the gods by being like them, and in certain respects his view is superior compared to the piety of the many, perhaps even superior simply. Consider the human case: judging from the example of Socrates, the greatest human beings (the wise men), respect and love those who are able and willing to try to be like them, more than they do those who simply take their advice or follow their commands. Thus, imitating something higher may be a nobler thing to do than merely obeying. But as the dialogue proceeds, it will become clear that in other respects Euthyphro's view is inherently

[31] For the analysis of how Euthyphro's "piety" differs from that of the many, I have used Strauss' lecture.

contradictory. Even at this early point in the discussion, it is obvious that the diviner has not given any careful thought, either to how his conception of piety diverges from the traditional views, nor to what his general conception of piety actually is. For he readily abandons the first definition, without realizing that, despite its being a formally unsatisfactory attempt at answering the philosopher's question, it does carry within it the seeds of his actual conception of piety. He does not try any further to impress upon Socrates the importance of doing what the gods do, even though we can assume that he continues more or less unconsciously to hold this view throughout the dialogue, and probably without seeing how it contributes to his self-contradiction. Nor does he appreciate the *practical* importance of approaching the concern for piety in the concrete manner he did. From the standpoint of everyday life, people do wish to know what actual practices *are* pious and which are not. The "abstract" question of what piety itself *is* would only be of interest to someone to the extent he is philosophical.

Socrates affects a stance of uninterest concerning Euthyphro's first definition. He in fact ensures that they probe the matter no further; because it isn't the *kind* of definition he wanted, he persuades Euthyphro that it is not a definition at all. On the surface, Socrates' deliberately steering away from a discussion of properly conceiving the divine seems counter to his purpose: in other dialogues (as noted) he has been known to attack the popular poetic accounts of the divine such as Euthyphro is espousing; moreover, it was Euthyphro's supposed knowledge of the divine which made him such an appealing teacher of piety in the first place (5a-b). But the dialogue reveals enough about Euthyphro's views only to allow the reader to consider their implications. We are invited to ponder the relative merits of a piety of doing what the gods themselves do, as opposed to doing what they command us to do, even if in Euthyphro's own dialogic contributions there is little help offered in finally judging the matter. But as much as not everyone would be well-advised to try to *imitate* the truly wise man (rather than simply follow his advice), so perhaps only a few are suited to a piety of imitating the divine, and Euthyphro is *not* one of those few.

If it wasn't already altogether clear, this first attempt at "teaching" Socrates offers sufficient evidence that Euthyphro is not naturally thoughtful, reflective, or

self-conscious--that he is, in short, unphilosophic. Moreover, it offers a possible explanation for Plato's fabricating such circumstances, involving his dialogic character Euthyphro in a case that is at once bizarre and ambiguous. Until this point, we might have asked why Euthyphro's position could not have been made more tenable, and thus more perplexing, more challenging--why his father was not portrayed as a murderer beyond a shadow of a doubt (for example, one who in a fit of anger killed his laborer or even his wife). For although it may be generally agreed that prosecuting one's father is impious, the problem of choosing between one's piety towards one's father and one's concern that justice be done could occasionally be taxing. True, Socrates does seem to facilitate this difficulty by later suggesting (with Euthyphro's approval) that the "pious" is a part of the "just" (cf. 11e-12e), thus suggesting that one may be able to explain or "justify" one's familial piety in terms of justice. But the dialogue does not address the issue of how one weighs the relative "justness" of different courses of action in more perplexing cases. That is, Socrates does not ponder the problem of the "already far advanced wisdom" that would be required to make the right choice (cf. 4a-b) if one were faced with a truly formidable dilemma concerning the place of one's familial piety in relation to other concerns for justice. In Euthyphro's case, however, this philosophic problem is unsuitable, for he is not a thoughtful young man with a difficult problem to solve who seeks out the philosopher's assistance; rather, he is a boastful fool whose confused "wisdom" leads him to create difficulties where they do not exist. The dialogue is therefore not a philosophic exploration of the rational and irrational character of familial piety and its place in the greater picture of justice (at least, not on the surface), for Euthyphro is wholly unsuited to such a pursuit. In fact, the character of Euthyphro seems to govern the kind of account of piety that Plato does provide and why that account is called *Euthyphro*.

V. A Noble Definition: What is Dear to the Gods (6e-9c)

His first "definition" having ostensibly failed to meet Socrates' requirements, the diviner continues the "lesson", this time better instructed by the one he is to instruct regarding what is to be taught. In deference to Socrates' wishes, he will teach the "idea" by which the impious things *are impious, and the pious things pious*. The task is not troublesome to Euthyphro who, without hesitation, proposes a new definition: "Then what is dear to the gods is pious, and what is not dear is impious" (6e-7a). Socrates acknowledges the answer as being "Altogether noble,..." (7a). But his praise, the first characterization of anything's being noble in the dialogue, is not without complication. [39] Although the nobility of what Euthyphro has said is apparent to Socrates, its truth is not:

> You have now answered just as I was seeking for you to answer. Whether it is true, however, I don't yet know. But clearly you will go on to teach me that what you say is true (7a).

He thereby implies that the noble and true do not necessarily coincide--that a fine account of something is not always a true account, that the beautiful or ennobling account may sometimes be a false account. Socrates seems preoccupied with the nobility of what is being set down (cf. 7a-e, 9e, 12e-13e, 14a, 15c). In light of the fact that Euthyphro claims to be wise in these matters, the thrust of the dialogue--on the surface--is to discover the *truth* about piety. But almost from the start, the profoundly unphilosophic nature of Socrates' "teacher" has dampened our hope that a wholly true definition would materialize. In the course of his refutation of Euthyphro's definitions, however, Socrates persistently employs this other criterion, as if it were appropriate for a good definition of piety: he patterns the flow of conversation to ensure that a conception of the pious be noble, thus suggesting that piety and nobility are somehow related.

Encouraged by Socrates' endorsement of the nobility of his definition, Euthyphro indulges his student's scrutiny of his precepts. Socrates declares:

> Come then, let us consider what we are saying. The thing dear-to-the-gods and he who is dear-to-the-gods are pious, while the thing hateful-to-the-gods and he who is

[39] This is the first time the word noble (*kalos\kalon*) is used in the dialogue. There are fourteen references to *kalon*, the Greek word meaning fine, fair, beautiful, or noble: 7a, 7d-e(3), 9e(2), 12e-13e(4), 14a(2), 15c(2).

> hateful-to-the-gods are impious. The pious is not the same as the impious, but most opposite. Isn't this so? (7a) [40]

It appears that Socrates is merely restating the terms of the definition for the purpose of clarity and mutual comprehension; so Euthyphro readily gives his assent. He considers Socrates' summation to be well said and agrees that it reflects his own views. There are elements in Socrates' version of the definition, however, which seem to go beyond clarifying the original. First, he uses the expression "hateful-to-the-gods" to replace what Euthyphro calls "not dear to the gods". This subtle linguistic alteration appears innocent enough, for one might casually equate what is hateful with what is not dear. Nonetheless, it suggests a possibly important consideration with regard to how the idea of the impious is to be understood. Is the impious simply *whatever* is *not* identified with the pious; or is it an idea unto itself such that only what is positively *hated* by the gods is impious?

The development of this problem within the dialogue began at 5d: Socrates, when first seeking to be taught the pious and the impious, suggested that each was ruled by a *separate* idea;

> Or isn't the pious itself the same in every action, and again, isn't the impious opposite to everything pious, while it itself is similar to itself and has a certain idea in accordance with impiety--everything, that is, that is going to be impious? (5d)

Euthyphro does not succeed in providing a definition in accordance with the the original requirements. So Socrates asks again, but this time he seems eventually to speak in terms of a *single* governing *idea*, and with regard to what is pious and *not* pious rather than *impious* . Furthermore, we recall, he subtly complicates the issue by referring to the *eidos* of the pious, which Euthyphro apparently considers to be interchangable with *idea*. He begins:

> Do you remember that I didn't bid you to teach me some one or two of the many pious things, but that *eidos* itself by which all pious things are pious? For surely you were saying that it is by one *idea* that the impious things are impious and the pious things pious. Or don't you remember? (6d-e).

And with Euthyphro's assurances that his memory is intact, Socrates continues;

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[40] Once again, I have departed from West's translation. The Greek expression employed in this passage is somewhat ambiguous. West's translation, "The thing dear-to-the-gods and *human being* [my emphasis] dear-to-the-gods..." is a possible translation, but since "human being" is more clearly denoted by other expressions, it seems fitting to substitute a less concrete expression.

> Then teach me whatever this *idea* itself is, so that by gazing at it and using it as a pattern, I may declare that whatever is like it, among the things you or anyone else may do, is pious, and whatever is not like it is not (6e).

Euthyphro apparently adopts this strategy of finding a single governing idea, but--eliminating or conflating the "not pious"--limits his definition to the pious and *impious*:

> Then what is dear to the gods is pious, and what is not dear is impious (6e).

This brings us to Socrates' recapitulation of that definition; he introduces the "hateful-to-the-gods" along with the "dear-to-the-gods" to define the pious and the impious, suggesting then that they are ruled by two separate and opposite ideas. By doing this, he seems tacitly to distinguish the "not pious" from the "impious"; his definition allows for the possibility of a (maybe vast) "middle ground" of things that are neither, or both, god-loved and god-hated.

Secondly, Socrates replaces the grammatical form used by Euthyphro, 'what is dear to the gods is pious', by coining the expression 'god-dear' (*theophiles*). Since he might just as easily have said '*that* which is dear to the gods'(*to tois theois prophiles*), the change to *theophiles*, seems to de-emphasize the loving things (the gods) and call attention to the recipient of their love (the things loved). That is, Euthyphro's version seems to stress that by the activity of holding something dear, the gods render that thing pious. Socrates' expression, on the other hand, tends to focus attention on the object that is held dear.

Having made these subtle and perhaps significant alterations to this "altogether noble" definition, Socrates begins what seems to be his real intended task in this conversation: undercutting Euthyphro's faith in his own knowledge. The philosopher's point of departure is to resurrect Euthyphro's conception of the gods, his version of the divine; he reminds the diviner of what was said earlier, that the gods differ with each other, and that there are enmities among them toward each other (7b). Euthyphro is by no means immediately shaken by this recollection, and it is only with time and much effort on Socrates' part that he can be shown how his current definition and his conception of the gods are at odds.

Beyond the purpose of ensuring the consistency of Euthyphro's speeches about piety itself, Socrates now (in effect) further insists that any view of piety must be consistent with

its corresponding view of the divine--that Euthyphro, and all other Athenians, should be held accountable for the coherence of their conception of the divine. Euthyphro himself must concede the importance of this broader consistency; in his first definition he accused the Athenians of contradicating themselves--of believing in the stories of the gods, while nonetheless ridiculing Euthyphro for trying to be like those gods (6a). Socrates lets the validity of this next definition rest on Euthyphro's own ability to give a non-contradictory explanation of man's piety in relation to the divine; he must show how it is possible to be pious according to his definition, given that the divine things are as he claims them to be. Failing in this endeavour, Euthyphro subsequently drops his altogether "noble" definition in favour of an 'improved' version which seems to reconcile the conundrum. He does this, however, without exploring the other possible resolution: that his conception of the gods--quarrelsome divinities who have enmities amongst themselves--is somehow defective.

Socrates' strategy in bringing Euthyphro's contradiction to light begins with observations about men before turning to a consideration of Euthyphro's gods; he asks what are the differences that make for enmity and anger among *men* (7b). Moreover, they start by looking at the kinds of differences that *do not* result in enmity and anger among men and only then turn to the kinds of differences which are not easily settled. We can observe that Euthyphro's acceptance of this strategy--reaching an understanding about the gods by extrapolating from the human experience--licenses a reversal of his (implicit) view of piety (humans "imitating" gods); he conceives of gods as larger-than-life imitators of men. The collective poetic accounts themselves surely furnish a picture of what the gods quarrel about, but Euthyphro does not challenge Socrates' approach in these things. He does, rather unconsciously, replace the "divinely inspired" accounts in which he is well versed (according to him) with an understanding of the gods which is inspired by, in effect ratified by, as well as reconciled with human experience.

Socrates proceeds to give three examples of things that he and Euthyphro might argue about which would not result in their becoming enemies to each other (7b-c). First, he asks about number, saying that if he and Euthyphro should differ about which of two groups of

things is greater, their difference would not make them enemies and angry at each other; rather, having recourse to calculation, they could quickly settle it. Similarly with the second example, Socrates asks whether the same would apply should they differ about the greater and the less, suggesting that this difference might quickly be solved by "measuring". Thirdly, he considers the technique of weighing, suggesting that it is the means for reaching a decision about the heavier and lighter. Euthyphro "of course" agrees once more (7c).

The point Socrates is making seems virtually self-evident; by calculating, measuring, and weighing, human beings can settle disputes about number, size, and weight. Thus we are incidentally reminded of the importance of agreed-upon common conventions for peaceful political life. Might this have some bearing on at least the political implications of properly understanding piety, the importance of shared conventional conceptions? Be that as it may, it is rather what Socrates does not say that must be taken into account; human beings rarely disagree about these matters from a purely theoretical standpoint in the way that a natural scientist or philosopher might, except, of course in a matter of some political significance when the public demands on principle that "the truth" be exposed with regard to some matter. Rather, most human beings become involved in disputes for the sake of some material benefit which is at stake; and so they measure their own property, that of others, and anything that might be exchanged between them to ensure that they get their due. In these cases, an agreed upon system of units and measures seems to ensure that "just" measurement is possible in a community of men. Moreover, even though a dispute arising between two individuals (regarding some measurable thing) can be settled through measurement, the problem of the enmity and anger which perhaps exists between them may not. Here, and elsewhere in the corpus, Socrates seems to treat all issues as if all anyone cared about--men or gods--is the *truth*, when in fact for many people, the truth is only important insofar as it vindicates their own opinion or desire in some matter.

Measuring for human beings, or at least such measuring as they can agree upon, appears to be limited to material things. Socrates is about to question Euthyphro regarding immaterial (and thus presumably immeasurable) things like the just, noble, and good.

Moreover, there are other presumably immaterial things that men quarrel about for which they have no recourse to measuring: the gods, and consequently (as we have seen) true piety. Euthyphro claims to be an expert in these divine things. He says, for example, that Zeus was the "best" and most just of the gods (5e), and yet there is no agreed-upon way of "measuring" to prove that Zeus is greater than any other god; one would have to have an account of what makes a god great, and a means of measuring it. But since the gods are believed to be immaterial, Euthyphro has no way of verifying his assertion (should anyone contest it), save the poetic accounts which have been handed down from ultimately anonymous sources. Likewise, there are varying accounts in Greek tradition of how many the gods are, where they came from, who begot them, what they've done and why; but there is no way to "calculate" this, for not being visible to human beings, they cannot be counted, much less measured or weighed. [41]

With this ironic preface concerning the differences that supposedly do *not* result in enmity, Socrates returns to the original topic. Asking once again what it is that *does* arouse enmity and anger amongst human beings, he anticipates that Euthyphro will not have an answer at hand, and so suggests that not only themselves, but all other human beings, differ and can't come to a sufficient agreement about the just and the unjust, the noble and shameful, and the good and bad, and consequently they become enemies to each other. Euthyphro agrees.

Once again, what has been said needs careful examination. Human beings are not, as a rule, continually engaging in theoretical disputes about the just and unjust, noble and shameful, good and bad. The kinds of quarrels Socrates seems to be referring to are epitomized by those which take place in the law courts. More often than not, such disputes

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[41] Compare this to 10a-b, where Socrates speaks of the things carried, led, and seen. Although the gods are "carried" to the Acropolis on the robe that is brought to the Great Panathenaea (6c), they are not portable, they have no mass, no weight. Although they are portrayed for us by good painters (6c), we (including these same good painters) cannot see them, for they are not visible, thus they cannot be counted. Although men try to lead the gods to bring blessings upon them by making sacrifices, there is perhaps no way of knowing what they find pleasing. So far as we are reliant upon natural reason, human beings cannot be sure that gods are willing to do anything we request of them.

are *not* about fundamental principles of justice, since the political administration of justice already requires agreement on basic notions; rather they are about the details of the case. Truly basic disagreements about justice, manifested in radically different conceptions of it, distinguish regimes and particularize whole peoples into tribes and nations.

Without expressly considering how it is that human beings become enemies regarding the just and the unjust, noble and shameful, good and bad, and *why* there is nothing analogous to calculating, measuring, and weighing that might aid in the settlement of disputes, Socrates, although voicing scepticism that the gods do indeed quarrel, revives that subject, asking Euthyphro if the gods do indeed differ about these same things (7d). The given list is complete according to Euthyphro. Besides his failure to note that "piety" and "gods" are also most potent subjects of *human* disagreement--as his own and Socrates' cases illustrate--Euthyphro cannot think of an alternate plausible account of the cause of the *gods* for quarreling. Nevertheless, the traditional accounts, which he himself quotes, portray the gods as envious, desirous, fearful, and jealous; more than anything else, human-like passions seem to be at the root of their clashing and quarreling.

Euthyphro, like most human beings, has an anthropomorphic conception of the gods, as illustrated by his willingness to accept Socrates' ongoing comparison of the gods to human beings. But just as Euthyphro is oblivious to the reality that most people only argue over questions of nobility, justice, and goodness out of self-interest, he forgets about and, considering them abstractly, attributes to them, a sense of virtue--one that is above the envy, fear, and jealousy. So although an all-too-human picture of the gods remains, it is a higher, more noble conception of humanity which he (like most people) attributes to the divinities. Socrates deduces the implications of understanding gods in human terms:

> Then among the gods too, well-born Euthyphro, some believe some things just, others believe others, according to your argument, and noble and shameful and good and bad. For surely they wouldn't quarrel with each other unless they differed about these things, would they (7d-e).

Taken to its logical conclusion, this portrayal of Athens' gods is less than divine. Human beings differ because they hold different beliefs about the just, noble, and good; not only the incommensurability of the subject matter--the just, noble and good--but the fact that they

are dependant on belief, on opinion, rather than on knowledge, leads men to quarrel. By implication, the gods too, according to Euthyphro, struggle with the same difficulties; they too are therefore not inherently knowledgeable about the virtues.

At this point, the purpose of Socrates' line of questioning at last begins to surface, for the conversation comes back to the subject of the gods and what they love, what is dear to them. He asks Euthyphro, "And don't they [the gods] each also love whatever they believe noble, annd good and just, and hate the opposites of these things?" (7e). Euthyphro answers affirmatively.

With this, Socrates is able to show that Euthyphro's gods and his altogether noble definition of the pious are not compatible. He observes: "Then the same things, as is likely, are both hated and loved by the gods, and the same things would be hateful-to-the-gods [or god-hated] as well as dear-to-the-gods [or god-dear]" (8a), and concludes that the same things would be both pious and impious, according to Euthyphro's argument (8a).

With this problem in mind, Socrates resurrects the consideration of Euthyphro's lawsuit:

> Then you didn't answer what I asked, you wondrous man. For I wasn't asking what same thing is at once both pious and impious: whatever is dear-to-the-gods is also hateful-to-the-gods, as is likely. Consequently, Euthyphro, in doing what you are now doing, punishing your father, it is nothing wondrous if you are doing something dear to Zeus but hateful to Kronos and Ouranos, and dear to Hephaestus but hateful to Hera. And if there are other gods who differ with one another about it, it is so with them in the same way (8a-b).

The philosopher thus illustrates the full gravity of Euthyphro's contradiction by speaking in terms that are familiar to a "wondrous one", drawing from those very stories of the gods so dear to Euthyphro to make his point: Zeus, who punished his father, Kronos, might consider Euthyphro's actions to be just--hence loving them--but Kronos might hate such things--hence considering Euthyphro's actions, like those of his own son, to be unjust. However, Socrates' choice of examples is ironic insofar as Kronos, although a hater of father-punishing--because of what Zeus did, also punished his own father Ouranos. [42]

[42] In this respect, the character of Kronos is like the men Glaucon mentions in *The Republic* who, having both done injustice and suffered it, and having found the latter far more distasteful than the former, regard it profitable to set down a compact amongst themselves neither to do injustice, nor to suffer it (*Republic*,

Consequently, he shows the gods not only as being in disagreement amongst themselves, but fickle insofar as their views on these important questions are (presumably) inconsistent, but change according to selfish interest. By distinction, Euthyphro's account of these same things (as observed earlier) differs insofar as he attributes to them a self-conscious concern for a moderation and justness that is not clearly apparent in this particular poetic passage of Hesiod. Euthyphro not only anthropomorphizes the gods (like most people), but he ennobles them too; he attributes just motives to Zeus and calls him the most just of the gods, as though to portray him as the most noble superhuman. Now, attributing virtues to the gods is not altogether foreign in the Greek poets' muddled accounts of the gods, but Euthyphro's attributing justice to this particular tale of the gods' father-punishing simply shows that he has a confused understanding of justice and what it would mean for a god to be just.

There are a multitude of gods in addition to those Euthyphro had used to illustrate his "proof" (Kronos, Zeus, Ouranos). In particular, Socrates mentions two other members of Zeus' family, the goddess Hera, his wife, and their son, Hephaestus. As his wife, Hera would probably find his punishment debasing and fear it to be the first step toward mother-punishing (cf. 5d-e). Hephaestus, on the other hand, who was once thrown down from heaven by his father for trying to defend his mother, might desire to get revenge on the king of the gods, and so approve of father-beating. (cf. *Iliad*, I, 586-594 and *Republic*, 377c-d). Socrates' careful choice of examples conjures up visions of the entire clan of Zeus indiscriminately beating and otherwise abusing each other with no overriding principles of justice. Hera also might have equivocal feelings, since the traditional stories recount that Hera was in fact envious of Zeus' attention to others. And in *Theogony* she is said to have brought Hephaestus forth "without any act of love" to Zeus because she was "angered and quarreling" with her husband, and wished to retaliate for his giving birth to Athene by himself (*Theogony*, 927-9). If anything, this example serves to show that love and hate are intimately related for these gods. It is the envy and jealousy arising from the deeds of a lover that often result in anger and hate; and in traditional stories these emotions--which, precisely because

[42](cont'd) 358e-359a).

they involve gods, are exaggerated to a high degree--often have disastrous consequences for some one or many of the gods involved, and not infrequently for humans as well. Love, because it has the potential to be turned into great anger and even hate when put to the test, apparently needs something else to temper it. Euthyphro's revisionist view of the gods seems to address this problem in name alone--he attributes justice, rather than passionate motives, to explain purely willful deeds.

Nevertheless, Euthyphro's respect for his gods is not shaken by the tacit suggestions Socrates is making as to the motives of the gods in these poetic accounts; his saving grace is that these gods are far superior to human beings:

> But I suppose, Socrates, that none of the gods differs one with the another about this, at least: that whoever kills someone unjustly must pay the penalty" (8b).

Whereas human beings

> ...don't stop disputing in this way, especially in the law courts. For although they have done very many injustices, they will do anything at all to escape the penalty (8c).

On the face of it, what Euthyphro is saying seems absurd; almost all people agree about murder's being unjust and requiring *some* penalty (though they do not agree as to what sort of killing is unjust, i.e., what constitutes *murder*). When Euthyphro thinks of human disputes, he thinks of the court room. His impression of Athenian courts is that people in general are always trying to get away with injustice; they always want to escape the punishment that they deserve. Although this impression of the situation may not be entirely inaccurate--the common view in democratic societies is that the courts are full of criminals who claim they haven't done anything wrong--his conception of how human beings go about arguing their cases is mistaken. As Socrates points out, those who partake of courtroom disputes exhibit a certain respect for the notion of justice; the ones who admit they have done injustice also agree to pay some penalty (though they usually desire it to be the minimum one, rather than the just one). But Socrates also acknowledges that human beings who are willing to admit their guilt are rare. He reminds Euthyphro that men in court "...don't dare to dispute by saying that even if they have done injustice they need not pay the penalty. Instead, I suppose they assert they haven't done injustice,..." (8c-d). Euthyphro's father,

like most human beings, wouldn't dare openly to challenge the accepted notion of justice in the city, nor would it be prudent to do so. Normally, people have a certain respect for doing things in the accepted way, the way that the human beings with whom they associate generally agree is the "right way".

Here, at the central point of the dialogue, Socrates seems to identify a kind of piety to which Euthyphro--who would appear to take little interest in human things as such, preferring to concentrate on the divine--is insufficiently sensitive. Human beings have a respect for the right way of doing things; when they go to court, they are respectful toward the Athenian judicial system, even awed, and rarely is there a man arrogant (or imprudent) enough to openly defy the importance of a standard of justice altogether. Men do not dispute by saying that although they have done injustice, they need not pay the penalty (although they might still hope for such an outcome): that hubristic stance is more to be expected in the gods of Greek *mythoi*. So, as a matter of prudence if nothing else, it is important for most accused men, even those who are guilty, to appear respectful of the judicial system. And this need to at least appear respectful points to the generally accepted view that such respect is appropriate.

Human beings, according to Socrates, don't dispute by claiming that the doer of injustice need not pay the penalty; instead, they perhaps dispute who the doer of injustice is, and what he did, and when (8d). Given a general agreement (or at least acceptance) of the court's basic principles of justice, human beings haggle over the details of their own particular conduct: the who, the what, and the when--all such elements being problematic in Euthyphro's own account of his father's misdeeds, and an examination of which would perhaps lead anyone other than Euthyphro to dismiss the whole affair. But what is most notably missing from Socrates' enumeration of the kinds of details disputed in court, is the "why" of the alleged crime, the motive. Euthyphro, it seems, fails to consider why his father left the hired man in the ditch. This question alone leaves Euthyphro without a moral or legal leg to stand on by Greek standards.

Following this short detour into the Athenian court, they return to the subject of the gods. Socrates, once again accepting the dubious but conventional assumption that the gods do indeed quarrel, suggests once again that the same things hold for the gods as for human beings: "For surely, you wondrous man, no god or human being dares to say that the doer of injustice ought not to pay the penalty" (8e). In this view, the gods, because they do not dare to act otherwise, seem to be restrained by fear, respect, and shame like human beings. They too, according to Euthyphro's view (for he agrees), are "pious" about doing things the right way.

The gods having been portrayed like mortals disputing in the courtroom, Socrates now puts Euthyphro's particular case as it might be laid before a court of gods. Although Euthyphro seems indifferent about the common opinion of the Athenian jury, asked by Socrates how he could win before a similar jury of gods, he is forced to consider seriously the strength of his case; not being considered pious by the gods is a serious charge as far a Euthyphro is concerned.

> Come then, my dear Euthyphro, teach me too, so that I may become wiser, what your proof is that all the gods believe that that man died *unjustly* [my emphasis] who while serving for hire became a murderer, and then, bound by the master of the man who died, met his end because of his bonds before the one who bound him found out from the exegetes what he should do about him; *and* [my emphasis] that it is correct for a son to proceed against his father and denounce him for murder on behalf of someone of this sort. Come, try to show me in some way plainly about these things, that all gods believe more than anything that this action is correct. And if you show me sufficiently, I will never stop extolling you for wisdom (9a-b).

Socrates does not debate the details of the case with Euthyphro, the who, what, when, or the why; instead he gives his own interpretation of the case. First of all, while he does not explicitly defend the justness of Euthyphro's father's deed, he surely lessens any culpability, for in Socrates' version, the "bonds" are directly responsible for the man's death, which can even be regarded as divine fate as the murderer "awaits" the judgement of religious authorities. Finally, Socrates points out that in light of the murderer's dubious character, it would not be correct for a son to proceed against his father and denounce him on behalf of such a man. That is, he seems to suggest that the grounds for a son's prosecuting his father would have to be very strong (presuming there to be reasonable grounds at all), and

Euthyphro's case certainly does not constitute reasonable grounds.

Earlier, Socrates rejected Euthyphro's first definition on the basis that it was not a formal definition, but aimed rather at showing that a particular thing Euthyphro was doing was pious. Now he asks Euthyphro to do the very thing he earlier turned down, to show him that his own case is pious. Of course, the young man's ability to defend his actions is inextricably related to the soundness of his definition and his teaching. Although Socrates may never have entertained any real hope of learning about the pious from Euthyphro, or of having Meletus drop the indictment by becoming this man's "student", he can perhaps now test the soundness of Euthyphro's position and possibly persuade him to drop the lawsuit against his father. The philosopher asks to be shown unanimous support amongst the gods for Euthyphro's actions. The challenge is no doubt similar to the one Euthyphro's family reportedly made to him (4d-e), except that they ultimately appealed to a standard of what is "pious", whereas Socrates doesn't directly mention "piety". Instead, he asks to be shown first that all the gods would agree the man died "unjustly", and second, that all the gods believe "more than anything" that it is "correct" for him to proceed against his father. [43] This strategy may allow Socrates to succeed where Euthyphro's family failed. For Euthyphro explicitly argues that piety is to be explained in terms of justice; it is pious to do what the gods do, especially with respect to pursuing justice, and Zeus is the most just of the gods (cf. 5e). Socrates, without directly questioning Euthyphro's implicit belief that piety is doing what the gods do, does ask him to prove that what he is doing is clearly and unequivocably just.

The prize for Euthyphro's success in this endeavour will be public praise, something the young diviner has heretofore never experienced. Should he fail, however, he will not have to face public shame. In Socrates, Euthyphro has found an audience that is not predisposed to laughter, or at least one who manages to restrain that impulse. Nonetheless, he could be faced with a very private humiliation when he realizes that he was in fact the fool on those past occasions where he blamed his failure to convince the many on their alleged envy and ignorance.

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[43] Jan H. Blits, "The Holy and the Human, An Interpretation of Plato's *Euthypro*", *Apeiron*, 14(1), 1980, p.28.

Providing the proof that the gods unanimously support his actions is "no small matter" according to Euthyphro, but he could plainly "display" what Socrates asks (9b) to his own satisfaction, at least, presumably by using his preferred method of relating tales of the gods were he allowed to do so. Socrates ironically responds, "I understand. It's because I seem to you to be poorer at learning than the judges, since clearly you will show *them* that such things are unjust and that all gods hate them" (9b). [44] Euthyphro--who may be by now beginning to doubt his "student's" educability in divine things--discounts his repeated failures to convince men in the assembly (Socrates' similar unwillingness to accept Euthyphro's pronouncements reveals an unusual kinship with the many), and responds by renouncing all responsibility for his failure to show the judges, insisting that he can show them if only "...they do listen" (9b). As if to reassure Euthyphro, Socrates responds, "They will listen, if you do seem to speak well" (9c). At this point in the dialogue, Euthyphro's "speaking well" cannot be taken as given, to say the least. In fact, veiled behind his professed ambition to learn from Euthyphro, Socrates wants to show him that he does *not* speak well, and for the most incorrigible of reasons: he does not *think* well, beginning with his case against his father.

Euthyphro is momentarily saved from the task, for suddenly Socrates--so he tells Euthyphro--has come to the realization that even if Euthyphro should prove the unanimity of the gods with respect to his case, it would not satisfy his own quest to define the pious and the impious. He shares his reflections with Euthyphro:

> "Even if Euthyphro should teach me that all the gods believe that such a death is unjust, what more will I have learned from Euthyphro about what ever [sic] the pious and the impious are? For although this deed would be hateful-to-the-gods, as is likely, it became apparent just now that the pious and the not pious are not defined by this, for it became apparent that the hateful-to-the-gods is also dear-to-the-gods"(9c) [45]

The discussion thus far has ostensibly shown that Euthyphro's belief that the gods quarrel over what is dear to them contradicts his defining the pious simply as "what is dear to the

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[44] See 3b where Euthyphro uses the same expression "I understand..." as he interprets the laughter of the many, saying that they are envious.

[45] Once again, Socrates speaks of the impious and the not pious in the same speech, raising for consideration the question of whether they are in fact the same thing, or different.

gods". In order to maintain the internal consistency of his views, Euthyphro was encouraged by Socrates to prove that *all* the gods agree with his actions. But having accepted that this is what he must do to maintain the internal coherence of his teaching, Euthyphro undercuts the definition currently under consideration. He is intimidated by Socrates' argument that the pious cannot be defined simply as what is dear-to-the-gods, on the grounds that the thing dear to one god may be hateful to another, and consequently decides to form a new definition that takes into account the apparently fickle, squabling nature of the gods he believes in. He does not consider the possibility that perhaps he is mistaken about the nature of the gods, his version of the divine things, and that the contradiction could be harmonized by "re-making" his conception of gods rather than his definition of piety.

Once again, the unwitting Euthyphro allows himself to be guided onto another path and into another definition, even though there are unexamined avenues to be explored in the "unconscious" conception of piety presented in the definition at hand, avenues which reason suggests should be examined. This second definition has shown Euthyphro's gods to be in disagreement about important things that they are alleged to love--the good and the bad, the noble and the shameful, and the just and the unjust. Their arguing shows them to be lacking in knowledge about these important things. The logical consequence of this as far as human beings are concerned--if piety is what is dear to the gods--is the quandary concerning which god to follow. Unperturbed by his contradiction, Euthyphro moves on to a new definition, even though his previous definition suggested a way by which this apparent contradiction might be remedied. That is, as far as his own actions are concerned, Euthyphro chooses to mimic the "best" and most "just" of the gods (Zeus); he does, it seems, have a standard of sorts for choosing which god to imitate--justice and goodness--even though he does not recognize its significance to his conception of piety. But (as was the case in the previous definition) we can begin to understand Socrates' reason for not pursuing an in-depth exploration of the implications as the limitations of Euthyphro's soul become glaringly apparent.

Euthyphro's stance of doing what the gods do, rather than what they say, is--on the surface--a transcendent notion of piety; he perhaps thinks that he who tries to be like the gods is more dear to them. Now Euthyphro's conception suggests a way out of the dilemma of choosing between warring gods--to judge them by standards of goodness and justice. But it also implicitly suggests that it is possible for Euthyphro to know the just and good better than, and independent of, the gods. A basic theological problem arises--why do we need gods as our rulers, or even as our guides, if they can and necessarily must be judged according to some higher standard. If human beings are able to judge what is good and just on their own--or, at least as well as the gods do--why not bypass the gods altogether, at least for the purpose of ethical guidance? Implicit in Euthyphro's account is the suggestion that the gods are not ruled simply by their own wills, but according to higher things--the forms of the just and good. And thus the gods are not really gods, i.e., not really the highest things.

This second definition raises some important questions concerning the truth about piety. Do the gods really exist? Are they subordinate to the ideas? Do they have knowledge about anything of importance to human beings? Notwithstanding these theological issues, the nobility of Euthyphro's gods (whether they exist in fact or in fiction) is still in question. This is a problem Socrates openly tackles in the *Republic* as he attempts to reform the tales told about the gods. But here with Euthyphro, who seems so unfit to appreciate such matters, Socrates' critique of the traditional accounts is more subtle; although he seemingly concedes Euthyphro's view of the gods throughout the dialogue--starting with this second definition--Socrates also concerns himself with the nobility of Euthyphro's definitions, particularly where the profile of the gods is concerned (cf. 9e, 12e, 13a, 15c). To say that the pious is what is dear to the gods seemed altogether noble to Socrates (7a). But we can see how this depends on what the gods are like--to want to emulate or worship noble models is noble. The truth about the divine, the question of whether the gods even exist, then, has no bearing on the nobility of the Athenian conception of piety. Socrates' efforts in remaking the tales of the gods are not therefore primarily for the sake of promoting atheism in Athens, but rather to "make" a noble standard.

VI. Third Definition:

Love and the Will of the Gods (9c-11b)

With a generous flourish, Socrates lets Euthyphro "off from" the challenge of showing the gods' unanimity: "If you wish, let all the gods believe it unjust, and let all hate it" (9c). This he follows with a newly adjusted definition for Euthyphro's perusal, "...that whatever *all* [my emphasis] the gods hate is impious, and whatever they love is pious, but whatever some love and others hate is neither or both" (9d). In the new definition, Socrates refrains from using the expressions "dear-to-the-gods" and "hateful-to-the-gods", instead depicting the qualitites of the pious and the impious as derivative from, if not simply incidental to, the loves and hates of the gods.

For the first time in the dialogue, Socrates offers some clearer intimation of the distinction between the "not pious" and the "impious". He appends to the definition *two* possible categories situated somewhere between the pious and the impious, including in addition to the "neither pious nor impious" the novel (and perhaps empty) class of those things which are "both pious and impious". Thus one possibility he suggests is that there are things which are "neither" pious nor impious, and as such, both not pious and not impious. We might refer to such things as the divinely *indifferent*; there could be unanimity among the gods, and this still be a valid and useful category. The other possibility, that some things are "both" pious and "impious", might be called the divinely *contentious*, and it definitely would preclude unanimity among the gods. These middle categories seem to be residual insofar as the leftovers--those things neither loved nor hated by *all* the gods--are put into them. But given the problems presented by the gods' quarreling in the last definition, it seems that there are few things (things of import to human beings, at any rate) which Euthyphro's gods do agree upon. Hence, on Euthyphro's view (and in this, he is of a piece with the traditional view), *most* things would seem to belong in one of these middle categories, and the most important human things to the most perplexing category: the divinely contentious. This, of course, is the nub of Socrates' quarrel with Greek religious tradition, alluded to here in the *Euthyphro*, and reformed in the *Republic*.

Socrates does not further consider the things that are neither loved nor hated by the gods (the divinely indifferent). But it is clearly important for human beings to distinguish things the gods feel indifferent toward from those matters they feel strongly enough about to fight over (the things that some gods love and others hate), especially if the gods' love (and hates) are to be a guide for human actions. For in the one case, men may proceed indifferent to anything besides human judgements, whereas the other puts men in a position of having to carefully weigh the love of one god against the hate of another, burdening each of us with having to choose which god to serve and which to offend. Moreover, insofar as men's choices are divergent, the quarrelling and warring amongst the gods is translated into the bitterest conflicts amongst men, injecting disharmony both within and between polities.

Socrates, then, seems to have brought their discussion of piety to a new juncture by tacitly suggesting that an adequate definition of the pious can only be based on a conception of divine unanimity. And, furthermore, the maximum political utility of religion presumes its being grounded on a principle of divine harmony. But given a commitment to such a unanimity amongst the gods, one confronts the issue of a monotheistic versus a polytheistic conception of the divine. What might be the cosmic or human purpose of the existence of a multitude of gods who are in agreement on everything they do and everything they hold to be true? Is not a unified pantheon essentially the equivalent of a Leviathan-like divinity, a single all-powerful god? Be that as it may, from this point forward, they do not further discuss the correctness of an account of warring gods, silently discarding it altogether.

According to Euthyphro, there is nothing to prevent them from defining the pious in the way that Socrates has restated his most recent definition. And, despite Socrates' cautioning him ("But consider on your part whether by positing this you will most easily teach me what you promised"; 9d), Euthyphro presents the third definition in the exact words Socrates suggested to him, with the exception that he leaves out the category of things both loved and hated by the gods: "Well, I would say that the pious is whatever all the gods love, and that the opposite, whatever all the gods hate, is impious" (9e).

Socrates' first concern is, once again, for the noble (cf. 7a); this time, however, he is not certain that what Euthyphro has said *is* "altogether noble"; rather, he asks, "So shouldn't we consider again, Euthyphro, whether this is said nobly? Or should we let it go and just accept what we ourselves and others say, conceding that something is so if only someone asserts that it is? Or ought we to consider what the speaker says?" (9e). Earlier, Socrates had subtly indicated that he knew something about both the noble and the pious (cf. 7a). Similarly, his reluctance to endorse this new definition seems to be based on a preconceived understanding of the problem. For although Euthyphro is willing to suppose that his definition is said nobly, Socrates ironically assures his teacher, "Soon, my good man, we will know better" (10a).

This third definition seems to be altered in two significant ways as compared with the second definition: it is explicitly based on the unanimity of the gods, and it concerns "whatever" the gods love. However, Socrates' doubt about this definition's nobility seems to stem not from the requirement of unanimity--for he has been consistently, if unobstrusively, opposed to Euthyphro's contention that the gods quarrel about anything whatsoever--but from the incidental character with which the gods' love is imbued; "*whatever* [my emphasis] all the gods love...whatever all gods hate.." (9e). Perhaps, then, Socrates is questioning the nobility of a definition of piety that is based on the desires of gods, regardless of whether they love in accordance with their individual caprices or according to some commonly shared loves. [46]

Socrates advises his "teacher" to "Think about something like the following. Is the pious loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is loved?" (10a). In trying to explain what he means more plainly, Socrates turns to what seem like utterly unrelated matters. He says that, "We speak of something carried and carrying, and of led and leading, and seen and seeing" (10a). He then calls Euthyphro's attention to how such paired things differ from each other. The point of this exercise is to differentiate between the "activities"

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[46] The Greek text does not strongly support this interpretation of the importance of "whatever"; however, as the dialogue progresses, it becomes apparent that it is indeed the willful character of Euthyphro's gods and how they affect human beings which Socrates is objecting to.

of carrying\leading\seeing and the attributes or "passivities" of being something carried\led\seen. Next Socrates identifies a fourth example to be compared with the previous ones; "And isn't there also something loved, and different from this, the thing loving" (10a). Despite Socrates' casually implying that this case is perfectly analogous to the previous three, reflection reveals there to be some important differences, as will shortly be shown. [47]

Next he asks if the thing carried is something carried because it is carried, or because of something else (10b). Euthyphro replies that it is indeed because of this, as it is for the things led and seen. They don't discuss the thing loved.

Socrates draws out the implications of what has been said thus far. "Then it isn't because it is something seen, that it *is* [my emphasis] seen, but the opposite: because it *is* [my emphasis] seen, it is something seen" (10b-c). He makes identical observations about the thing led and the thing carried. [48]

Enlightening Euthyphro about the point of his inquiry thus far, he says:

> Isn't it quite clear, Euthyphro, what I wish to say? I wish to say that if something comes to be something or is affected, it isn't because it is something coming to be that it comes to be, but because it comes to be, it is something coming to be. Nor because it *is* [my emphasis] something affected, is it affected; rather, because it *is* [my emphasis] affected, it is something affected. Or don't you concede that it is so? (10b-c.)

Wishing to apply this generalization to the thing loved, he asks Euthyphro if it too is not either something coming to be or something affected (10c). And, with Euthyphro's approval, they conclude: "Then this too is just like the previous ones. Not because it is something beloved, is it loved by those by whom it is loved, but because it is loved, is it something beloved" (10c). [49]

Thus far the argument seems to rest on two premises. First, Socrates made the argument that the things affected or coming to be are such because of the action of being affected or because of the process of coming to be. He concludes that it is the action (carrying\leading\seeing) done to the object which renders it something carried\led\seen.

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[47] This time he refers not only to the object of love (something loved), but also to the actor who loves (the thing loving).

[48] Note: the order has been reversed to seen\led\carried.

[49] I have diverged slightly from West's translation by replacing his "something loved" with "something beloved".

Within the range of choices Socrates offered, only this conclusion makes sense; something cannot be called "carried" unless it has actually been carried. But there are other attributes of the "things" carried\led\seen which might *account* for their being carried\led\seen. That is, to be carried, something must necessarily be portable; to be led, it must be leadable; to be seen, it must be visible. The fact that carrying can take place is dependant on the thing-to-be-carried's portability, for example. Although this may not seem to be of great importance with respect to Socrates' consideration of the things carried\led\seen--for it still remains the case that the thing carried is literally called something carried because it is carried, and not the reverse--it may weigh significantly in the analogy he wishes to draw between these things and the thing loved. That is, is "the lovable" altogether analogous to "the portable", "the leadable", and "the visible"?

This leads us to the second premise of the argument, that the thing loved is similar to the things carried\led\seen: that it is either something coming to be or something affected (10c). In the first place, his argument rests on the heretofore unexamined assumption that the things carried/led/seen and all their respective actions are essentially analogous, but reflection reveals that this is not true. Whereas seeing can be a reciprocal action (each viewer may be able to "see" the other), and leading--in human affairs, at least--may be a complementary reciprocity (e.g., in either politics or religion, the "leader" may both lead the many while at the same time being led by their inclinations and prejudices), there are no such reciprocities in the activity of carrying. Moreover, Socrates does not further clarify what he means by the expressions "affected" and "coming to be", and even though they appear to refer to different phenomena, he does not indicate which of the things carried\led\seen are "affected" and which (if any) "come to be"; or, if perhaps they might somehow belong to both categories. When something is affected, it seems to be moved, or changed by the thing that has an affect on it. Something led or carried, for example, takes part in the activity of carrying\leading insofar as it is moved from one place to another or led to do something it might not have done in the absence of the leading. The thing seen, however, remains unaltered as a direct result of being seen *per se*; it 'comes to be' seen, without participating in any activity.

The thing loved, on the other hand, seems to fit into both categories; it may be either something affected or something that comes to be, or both. Human beings, at least, may love in silence, from afar, and without letting their love be known, even to the one they love. At the same time, love may be manifested in physical acts, speeches, and gift giving, which may affect the beloved, even if only to make the recipient (now) *conscious* of his indifference. But sometimes the act of loving can itself elicit love in return; this, after all, is often the point of courtship. And this seems to be generally true of humans: we are more apt to like (or even love) some one who likes and cares for us... or, more precisely, who we imagine likes and cares for us. By inviting this comparison, Socrates seems to call attention to the dual character of "loving".

If the analogy is to fit, the relationship between the thing loved and the act of loving should coincide with that between the thing carried and the activity of carrying (and\or the thing seen\led). That is, "Not because it is something beloved, is it loved by those by whom it is loved, but because it is loved, it is something beloved" (10c). [50] But Socrates' discussion of the thing beloved is exceptional insofar as "those by whom it is loved" (i.e., the lovers) are mentioned (10c), whereas the carrier, the leader, and the viewer are not. [51] It is because of potential *reciprocity* of "the thing loving" that the loving example seems to differ from the carrying\leading\seeing examples. Whereas the fact that an object is portable\leadable\visible enables the carrier\leader\viewer to carry\lead\see it (and hence allowing it to be called something carried\led\seen), it is only because the loving thing loves a particular thing that that thing is *ipso facto* lovable. Moreover, while something does not become visible by virtue of being seen, something may indeed become lovable (or more lovable) by virtue of being loved; being loved may altogether enhance the beloved, bringing out the best in him or her. Beyond that, of course, we are all aware that what is lovable to one man may--as Euthyphro's view of the gods reminds us--arouse hatred or indifference in another, so what is lovable can only be determined in relation to a particular lover. Suffice it to say, "lovable"

[50] See footnote above regarding differences with West's translation of this passage.
[51] In keeping with their anthropomorphic treatment of the gods, Socrates speaks of lovers in suitably generalized terms ("the things loving"), giving no special status to either the gods or humans as lovers, or to their type of loving.

does not seem altogether analogous to "visible", much less to "leadable" or "portable".

However, the ostensible *relativity* of the lovable, which is somewhat akin to the axiom "beauty is in the eye of the beholder", requires some qualification. Just as men might disagree over what constitutes a correct standard of beauty, while still agreeing that it is beauty they seek or strive to attain; so might they also disagree about the characteristics of a fine (i.e., a noble or beautiful) human being, while agreeing that they should love what is noble and beautiful as opposed to what is ugly and base. Hence, men do, in a very broad sense, agree on the lovable, and, it is conceivable that through rational inquiry a clearer understanding of what truly merits love might be reached. Such an inquiry would necessarily have to seek an understanding of the good, the just, and the noble; but these are the very sorts of things which human beings (and Euthyphro's gods) are prone to argue about (cf. 7d), holding as they do divergent opinions about them. Thus, to know what is deservedly lovable, wisdom is required, which would seem to imply that wisdom, at least, is deservedly lovable. And thus the philosophical life is defensible, whether or not any other ways of life are.

The difficulties associated with defining "the lovable" seem much more perplexing as compared with the portable\leadable\visible. The portable is defined as what can be carried, the leadable as what can be led, and the visible as what can be seen. And admittedly, there are certain important complications in understanding these apparently simple notions. Men do have variable capacities--they are more or less strong, so that what is portable relative to one may not be so to another; their eyesight may be better or worse, so that one can distinguish what another cannot--but these are qualites that can easily be tested and measured so that portability and visibility can be more precisely determined, case by case. Leading, on the other hand, is a more complicated notion. In the physical sense of leading a horse to water or an ox to slaughter, it is somewhat like carrying: sheer physical strength can matter. But this is not what we are most concerned about with respect to leading human beings, whether morally, intellectually, politically,...or religiously, such as the religious leadership Euthyphro aspires to provide Atnens. We may still affirm that it is the stronger who lead, but the kinds of strengths involved here are not so readily measured, although they are observable. Such

leading is like loving insofar as it involves the souls of men and their respective kinds of susceptibilities to various kinds of persuasions and coercions. A definition of the "lovable" as 'what can be loved' has no universal significance to human beings insofar as men hold different things dear. And understanding human loving may be essential to understanding human leading. As noted before, the test of what is lovable remains that it is indeed loved, and this distinguishes it from the things portable\leadable\visible, which are such regardless of their ever undergoing the act of being carried\led\seen. Thus, it is more intelligible to say that the thing loved is something lovable simply *because* it is loved, than it is to say that the thing carried is something portable because it is carried. [52]

The question of how love works will have some bearing on how Euthyphro's earlier contention is to be understood; that is, the idea that the pious is loved by the gods because it is pious, and not that it is pious because it is loved. This is the matter Socrates now considers (10d), as he rubs it against their recent and opposite conclusion that something is beloved simply because it is loved (10d), and--by implication--that that something is loved and dear to the gods simply because they love it. Socrates had offered Euthyphro two choices: "Is the pious loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is loved?" (10a). The first, which Euthyphro chooses, seems more anthropomorphic. In this view, the gods are subordinate to the idea of something they perceive to be deservedly lovable (this is also how they were portrayed in relation to the ideas of the just, noble, and good; 7e). In the second case, the gods would have to be presumed as truly *originators*, their love (or their will) establishing what is pious for human beings, and making the pious identical with the dear-to-the-gods (or the will of the gods). Given the choice, Euthyphro, like most human beings, more or less unconsciously conceives of gods who are subordinate to ideas, presumably because he is restricted by his all-too-human anthropomorphic inclinations. The extent of the

[52] The examples employed by Socrates, carrying/leading/seeing, are a reminder of the various traditional signs of piety Euthyphro earlier said he believed in; the gods are invisible (for they cannot be seen) and neither are they portable or leadable (at least in any physical sense, and perhaps in any sense), despite the fact that humans carry their visible, portable icons (like the robe at the Panathenaea), in processions led by priests. There is, in Athens, a physical, measurable side of piety--even material sacrifices are made in an attempt to "lead" the gods a certain way.

gods' superiority over human beings, according to Euthyphro's conception, is that they *know* the virtues and recognize them as the proper things to love, whereas human beings do not. He has been lured unwittingly into committing himself to the idea of gods' being rational in their loves (thus ruled by reason), the most significant implication of which is that rational gods are necessarily subservient to the ideas which rule them; hence the just, the noble, and the good are truly the highest divine beings. Even if the gods know what the just, good, and noble are (unlike Euthyphro's disagreeable gods), and consequently love these things through an act of calculated *will* as well as having an affection for them (which can be distinguished from the capricious passionate sort of "love" traditionally attributed to Greek gods), their powers must be considered subservient to the forms of the good, noble and just. The gods themselves, then, may *exemplify* piety in their loving what they love; true piety may be the reverence of Goodness, Justice, and Nobility (or Beauty, *kalon*), which would entail revering Truth and Being, beginning with the truth about the being of these things. The God's loving does not *establish* what is pious, but *expresses* it. And since on this view the pious will be pious regardless of the gods' loving it, men need not look to the gods in order to act piously; they need only look to reason, just as the gods themselves do. If, however, most men are incapable of such thoroughgoing "daimonic" rationality, they may need more readily intelligible (i.e., anthropomorphic) conceptions of divinities, through which human reverence for the truly highest things can be mediated and enhanced. Such anthropomorphic conceptions could be thought of as "phantoms" (cf. *Republic* 534d) of the forms, one step removed from the truth.

As before, however, Socrates makes no effort to educate Euthyphro in the true implications of his third definition. Once again, he constructs an argument that seems especially calculated to arouse self-doubt in the young man. The ostensible conclusion concerning the third definition is that neither alternative--that the pious is loved by the gods because of being pious, or it is pious because it is loved--is correct, at least not within the context of Euthyphro's conception of piety (who never actually considered that latter alternative). Socrates concludes by illustrating the incongruities which arise from supposing

that they are.

> But if the dear-to-the-gods and the pious were the same, my dear Euthyphro, then, on the one hand, if the pious were loved because of being pious, the dear-to-the-gods would also be loved because of being dear-to-the-gods; and on the other hand, if the dear-to-the-gods were dear-to-the-gods because of being loved by gods, the pious would also be pious because of being loved. But as it is now, you see that the two are opposite, since they are entirely different from each other. For the one, because it is loved, is the sort of thing to be loved; the other, because it is the sort of thing to be loved, is loved. (10e-11a)

This proof seems to rest on the contention, accepted by Euthyphro, that the thing loved is like the things carried\led\seen. But a closer examination shows that unlike the things carried\led\seen, the thing loved is *both* loved because it is the sort of thing to be loved (that is, it is lovable to the lover), and it is the sort of thing to be loved (that is, it is a lovable thing) because it is loved by the lover (beloved). So the thing loved does indeed fit into both seemingly contradictory categories.

Socrates' leading Euthyphro to this apparently correct, but in reality false conclusion, seems to serve two functions. First it calls the reader's attention to the special qualities of "love" as a phenomenon and shows why piety cannot intelligibly be defined simply in terms of attributing to the gods a human-like love--for such love is neither pure, nor constant, nor absolute. The kind of loving that expresses piety points beyond the loving itself to those things most *worthy* of love, the things most lovable by nature, the truly highest things. Secondly, it should cause Euthyphro to doubt his wisdom. That the conclusion actually reached is superficial is perhaps indicated in Socrates' subsequent speech where he appears to lighten the criticism against Euthyphro, saying that he wasn't making the substance of the pious clear but rather speaking of a certain *affection* concerning it--that the pious is affected in being dear to the gods (11a). This last criticism hardly seems as drastic as his initial 'refutation' seemed to imply; the pious and the dear to the gods are not entirely unrelated after all--for the pious can at least be *described as* dear-to-the-gods, which may explain why this way of *referring* to it was earlier acknowledged to be altogether noble by Socrates (7a).

VII. Daedalus Digression:

Divine Ancestry and Moving Speeches (11b-11e)

Having failed three times to get a satisfactory definition of the pious from the diviner, Socrates momentarily digresses, resorting to the poetic tradition by way of explaining the cause of their apparent failure. He jokingly invokes the image of "their" ancestor Daedalus the legendary Athenian sculptor: their speeches, like his statues, seem to keep moving around and cannot be pinned down. The jest serves to establish a familial link between the two men (and other Athenians) and their ancestral gods. Upon Euthyphro's refusing to accept responsibility for the role of Daedalus in this dialogue, it is Socrates who, with some show of reluctance, lays claim to this "involuntary wisdom". This mythical digression, however, has more bearing on their discussion than may be immediately apparent.

It begins when Socrates invites Euthyphro to define the pious yet a fourth time. Borrowing from the terms that were employed in Euthyphro's depiction of the gods, he coaxes the diviner not to hide the thing he holds 'dear', pledging that he won't 'differ' with him about whether the pious is affected in being loved by the gods. [53] But Euthyphro, who seems both frustrated and disgruntled at this point, is now unresponsive to this latest entreaty. He complains that whatever they have put forth keeps going round and isn't willing to stay where they place it (11b).

The "student" takes this opportunity to evaluate his "teacher" impiously. He compares the things said by Euthyphro to the things of their ancestor, the legendary Athenian sculptor Daedalus, who was reputed to make statues so lifelike that they moved. He is also famous for making many *useful* things. Daedalus, then, a maker of useful and beautiful, lifelike things, may have a special significance for understanding anthropomorphic gods. Ironically prophesying that Euthyphro will blame him for their predicament, Socrates jovially conjectures that in light of his own kinship with Daedalus (Socrates' father, Sophroniscus, was a sculptor, and by tradition, practitioners of various arts were said to have descended

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[53] West translates "ei soi philon" as "If you please", but also notes that it literally means "if (it is) dear to you", *Four Texts on Socrates*, translated by West, note 32. p.54.

from the founders of those arts), Euthyphro might accuse him of making works in speech which run about, when in fact--in his opinion--Euthyphro is to blame. [54]

Given the opportunity, Euthyphro accepts the suggestion, and does blame Socrates, naming him the Daedalus. Socrates submits and suggests that he is even more clever than Daedalus, for that man was able only to move his own things whereas Socrates seems able to move Euthyphro's things as well as his own. And, according to Socrates, the most exquisite part of the art--and of the joke on Euthyphro, one might suspect--is that he is "involuntarily wise", for, he says "...I would wish rather for the speeches to stay still for me and to be placed unmoved, than, in addition to the wisdom of Daedalus, to get the money of Tantalus" (11d-e). This predicament of "involuntary wisdom" contrasts with Socrates' more familiar claim of "self-conscious ignorance" (cf. *Apology* 21d).

Socrates hereby introduces two more mythical characters into the dialogue, both having ironic significance with relation to the *Euthyphro*. Tantalus, whom Socrates alleges elsewhere in the corpus to be a son of Zeus (*Cratylus* 394d-395e) is thus another member of that divinely abusive family. Although possessing great wealth, Tantalus was damned by the gods to be eternally 'tantalized' by food and drink that was placed just beyond his reach, much as Socrates' (feigned) claim to be tantalized by Euthyphro's "great" wisdom. According to other accounts, Tantalus was tortured by the presence suspended above his head of a large rock, which he dreaded would fall at any time. Perhaps like Euthyphro, Tantalus is said to have committed a blasphemy, but the exact nature of his crime is not agreed upon by the poets, for some say he killed his son and fed him to the gods in a stew, while others say it was because he stole the gods' nectar and ambrosia in order to gain immortality. [55]

The other mythical figure, Daedalus, is also related to Zeus according to Socrates' account in the *Alcibiades I*. There the philosopher light-heartedly traces his own lineage all

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[54] See Carnes Lord's note #24 on *Alcibiades I* in *The Roots of Political Philosophy: Ten Forgotten Socratic Dialogues*, translated with interpretive studies, edited by Thomas L. Pangle, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), p.200.

[55] See "Olympia I" (55-65) in *The Odes of Pindar*, translated by Richmond Lattimore, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), p.2-3; and entry "Tantalus" in *Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*.

the way back to Zeus; starting with Daedalus, he goes back to Hephaestus, the god of craftsmen, and from him, to his father Zeus (*Alcibiades I*, 120e -121a). Laying claim to Daedalus again in the *Euthyphro* (if only facetiously), Socrates suggests the existence of an ancestral bond between himself and the greatest Athenian gods; Ouranos, Kronos, Zeus, Hera, and Hephaestus are to be followed by Daedalus, Sophroniscus (Socrates' father), and *Socrates*. But as is typical of Socrates' humour, it has a serious side. By insisting that he is descendant from these mythical figures, Socrates does nothing unusual as far as Athenian piety was concerned. Athenian gods were *ancestral* gods, and mortals were believed to have descended from them. In this sense, one's piety to a father or an elder is loosely related to one's piety to the gods, the heavenly fathers--a connection which the unorthodox Euthyphro obviously fails to make. So Socrates is not, after all, wandering so far from the topic of piety as might at first appear.

In the *Meno*, Socrates uses the legend of Daedalus to illustrate the difference between knowledge and right opinion (97d). There he says that although virtue can come from both knowledge and right opinion, the latter is inferior insofar as it tends to run away out of the human soul, like the images of Daedalus. Knowledge, on the other hand, is fastened in one place by a reasoned understanding of causes (97e-98a). Socrates likens the man in possession of right opinion (who cannot thereby teach stable virtue) to a diviner or prophet with respect to wisdom (99b-c). Euthyphro might be such a diviner, were he in possession of *right* opinion. Regardless of Socrates' role in putting the speeches into motion, the fact that he cannot pin down and defend his own "wisdom" is evidence that Euthyphro does not truly know what he claims to know, but rather opines it. And the discussion so far has cast considerable doubt on the rightness of his opining.

In the *Euthyphro*, Socrates associates himself with his father's art of sculpture in the course of acknowledging his 'kinsman' Daedalus. In other dialogues, however, he is equally ready to associate himself with his mother Phaenarete's art of midwifery, claiming to deliver men's thoughts from their souls (*Theaetetus* 149a-b). Why has Plato chosen that Socrates be a Daedalus rather than a midwife to Euthyphro? Perhaps because, as a midwife, Socrates

helps men pursue knowledge, whereas in the role of Daedalus, he merely illustrates the instability of opinions. But Socrates has also been known to help men deliver "thoughts" that were not worth raising so they might learn from the experience (*Theaetetus* 150b-d). Could Socrates not operate on Euthyphro in the same way--teaching him that his brain child is not worth raising? The answer may have something to do with a problem that is addressed (at least indirectly) in this dialogue: is there in fact knowledge to be had about piety, and is it truly a virtue? For some reason Socrates does not want simply to 'abort' Euthyphro's conception of the pious; he does not wish to leave Euthyphro barren, with nothing to replace what he thought he once had. This *may* be an indication that there is no knowledge to be had about piety; that it is only a vulgar utilitarian kind of virtue grounded in convention, and about which only opinions can be known. Conversely, it may suggest that knowledge about true piety, as distinct from traditional Athenian piety, is beyond the reach of most men, especially profoundly unphilosophic men like Euthyphro.

VIII. Justice and the Purpose of Piety (11e-16a)

Euthyphro is left bewildered, and distinctly unamused by the moving speeches that have plagued the "lesson" thus far. So the Daedalean Socrates adopts a more serious tone and pledges to take an eager part in showing Euthyphro how he might teach the pious. The philosopher now becomes the acknowledged as well as the *de facto* teacher. Henceforth, the undercurrent of the dialogue seems to flow toward an understanding of the purpose of piety, which, in its turn, subtly steers Euthyphro away from his unorthodox conception of piety back towards the traditionally held Athenian beliefs.

In what might seem to be a radical redirection of the conversation, Socrates begins his assistance by focussing Euthyphro's attention on the relationship between the pious and the just. His line of questioning, although perhaps unexpected, is not a novel departure from what has preceded in the dialogue thus far. Quite the contrary. To begin with, this dialogue on piety takes place because of the city's justice; both Euthyphro and Socrates are involved in court cases. And, although the philosopher's indictment and Euthyphro's lawsuit arise from disagreements about piety, they are to be settled by the institutions that represent and administer justice in Athens.

For Euthyphro's part, it is the gods' standard of justice which determines his own standard of piety--he attempts to mimic Zeus, whom he depicts as the most "just" of the gods (5e). It is according to this "divine" standard of justice that Socrates challenges Euthyphro to show both that the gods agree his father acted unjustly, and that they agree his own actions in prosecuting him are correct. In Socrates' case, the indictment against him, at least as it is stated in the *Apology* (and as alluded to here; 2c), contends that he "...does injustice by corrupting the young, and by not believing in the gods in whom the city believes" (*Apology*, 24b-c). Moreover, at his trial he gets Meletus to admit that the "corrupting" is (un)religious in character (26b), an outcome that is also anticipated here (3a-b). Indeed, Socrates' alleged impiety is treated by the Athenians as a capital form of injustice.

So, Socrates' concern to determine more precisely how piety is related to justice is hardly misplaced. But although Euthyphro willingly concedes that the pious can be described

as just (11e), he becomes confused and says he cannot "follow" when Socrates requests a further clarification: "And is all the just pious? Or is the pious all just, while the just is not all pious, but part of it is pious, part something else?" (12a).

In light of Euthyphro's apparent confusion, Socrates ironically admonishes the young man:

> And yet you are no less younger than I am than you are wiser. But as I say, you are being fastidious [or, haughty, *truphas*] because of your wealth of wisdom (12a).

Euthyphro, being so much younger than Socrates, should be able literally to "follow" the slower old man (cf. 4a), but his claim to wisdom is both brazen and haughty. It is brazen because the respect, the "piety", traditionally due to age is partially based on the presumption that the older are indeed "wiser"; and yet Euthyphro is challenging the wisdom of his father, who is not only an old man, but (presumably) his benefactor. And, by calling Euthyphro "haughty", Socrates continues the ironic charade of appealing to his "teacher's" exaggerated sense of vanity. However, in doing so, he also portrays himself as one of the many Athenians whom Euthyphro habitually scorns for their ignorance. And inasmuch as Euthyphro had initially considered himself and Socrates to be superior to the many, Socrates' identification with the many Athenians is bound to be unsettling for the young diviner.

In any case, what the "old" Socrates is asking about the pious and the just is not hard to follow, as his explicit chiding affirms. Thus ironically calling Euthyphro a "blessed man", he urges the youth to exert himself. Indeed, what Socrates seems to be asking--whether the pious is a subset of the just, or the reverse--would not seem an especially subtle point. But Euthyphro's confusion is also not difficult to understand, for throughout the dialogue he has tacitly identified the pious with the just--piety *is* punishing doers of injustice and copying Zeus, the most just god--and so it is not surprising that he is unprepared to distinguish them and say immediately whether the pious is part of the just, or the reverse. [56]

In the hope of bringing all of Euthyphro's wisdom to light, Socrates illustrates his point with a line of poetry. But--curiously--he does this only for the sake of contradicting the line he has chosen, for he says that he wants to say the opposite of what the poet said

[56] See Marlo Lewis, "An Interpretation of Plato's Euthyphro", p.48.

who wrote;

> Zeus, the one who enclosed and planted all these things,
> You are not willing to speak of; for where dread is, there too is awe (12a-b). [57]

Socrates, who himself has been accused of 'making gods', quotes what a "poet" (in Greek, literally a "maker") composed (made) when he said (made) something about Zeus--Euthyphro's most admired god. [58] Here is a chance to compare Socrates the (allegedly) *innovative* "maker" to a supposedly pious maker, that is, one who would not be indicted for impiety. Socrates does not give the poet's name. In the verse, Zeus is described as a sort of divine farmer who 'enclosed and planted all these things'. The speaker in the poem observes that men, or at least the one who is addressed in the poem, do not speak ill of Zeus; for in light of the dread they feel towards him, it is evident that they also find themselves in awe of him as well (and therefore speechless). Socrates differs with the poet insofar as he would reverse the apparent relationship between dread and awe. Instead of 'where dread is, there too is awe', Socrates would say "where awe is, there too is dread". For, he reasons, "...many seem to me to dread when they dread diseases and poverty and many other such things, but to be in awe of none of these things they dread" (12b). Thus he suggests the alternative to Euthyphro "...doesn't anyone who feels awe and shame in some matter also fear and dread a reputation for villainy?" (12b). He seems to establish that the things we are in awe of form a *sub-category* of the things that we dread; awe is to dread just as "odd" is to "number" (12c).

Now that he has shown Euthyphro what he meant by the question, Socrates, recalling the original purpose of this poetic digression, asks again: is all the just pious, or is the pious all just? (12a). And, with Euthyphro's agreement, based on Socrates' poetic and mathmatical explanations, they agree instead: "Where 'pious' is, there too is 'just'," but "where 'just' is, everywhere is not 'pious'" (12d). The pious is but *part* of the just.

He seems to have taken a rather lengthy route in making his "easy to understand" explanation. For he uses the "odd" and "number" analogy to explicate the "awe" and "dread"

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[57] According to West, the work Socrates is referring to is the lost *Cypria*, believed to be authored by the post-Homeric poet, Stasinus, and describing the events of the Trojan war up to the point where the *Iliad* begins. See *Four Texts on Socrates*, translated by West, p.55-6., note #33

[58] Ibid, p.55, note # 35.

analogy, but the former alone might have served his purpose equally well--that is, if he simply intended to ask if the pious is a subset of the just. Thus, one must consider whether there is something about this faulty poetic analysis which has some special significance with regard to Socrates' understanding of piety and justice. To begin with, the relationship of 'set/subset', as Socrates interprets it, is evident in the verse even in its uncorrected state. So he could have used it equally well as it stood, or perhaps quoted some other verse he agreed with. Instead, he uses the occasion of teaching piety and justice to clarify the relationship of awe and dread. Not only does this serve to indicate one explanation of why Socrates is an opponent of the poets and the kinds of accounts they give (i.e., that too often, their reasoning is muddled); but also it calls attention to the sentiments of awe and dread which human beings feel for the gods (and their non-awful dread of other things), as a means of explaining how it is that piety is related to justice. We might suspect that Euthyphro's own understanding of that relationship is as muddled as the poet's understanding of awe's relationship to dread.

What *do* awe and dread have to do with piety and justice? The link between the quotation and the dialogue seems to be the term "awe" (*aidos*), also sometimes used as a synonym for "piety", or "reverence". The verse is concerned with men's actions and feelings towards the gods. Hence Socrates would seem, in effect, to be indirectly conveying some additional piece of the puzzle that is piety, but without explicitly identifying it as such. In fact, as we shall witness, Socrates seems to be suggesting that the poet is indeed conveying a view of *piety*--one with which he takes issue.

Socrates seems to differ with the poet in three important respects. Unlike the poet, Socrates is not himself willing to speak of Zeus; he certainly stifles Euthyphro's attempt to do so, and, as we shall see, he makes no direct mention of the gods *per se* in his explication of the poetic analogy. [59] Secondly, Socrates contends that awe is a part of dread (i.e., where awe is, there too is dread...) whereas the poet, according to Socrates, says the opposite, that dread is a part of awe (i.e., where dread is, there too is awe...). But we must question whether this

[59] Jan H. Blits, "The Holy and the Human, An Interpretation of Plato's *Euthyphro*", p.31.

interpretation is what the poet intended (however imprecise and muddled his speech may be), for quite likely the poet never intended to convey a set/subset distinction. This brings us to the third difference. Perhaps what the poet really wanted to suggest was that dread has *primacy* in men's relations with the gods, that it is the high degree of dread we feel for the gods (dreading them and their power more than anything else imaginable) which makes us in awe of them; whereas Socrates appears to say the opposite by suggesting that awe, not dread, is the primary human link to the divine. For the gods are, after all, the things human beings (those who believe in gods, at least) are most in awe of; the divine ruling powers are the definitive objects of awe.

Continuing on to Socrates' detailed explication of the relationship between awe and dread, we can observe that despite Euthyphro's unquestioning approval, the matter is more problematic than it first appears. To begin with, as examples of what "many" human beings dread but are not in awe of, he suggests two forms of human misery--poverty and disease. These things (in the form of fines and bodily sufferings) are--not incidentally--common punishments for breach of the law. But in most cases, they befall mortals as a result of what they call "bad luck". However, what Socrates does not mention (and what Euthyphro is too slow to detect), is that in the Greek religious tradition, as commonly in the Christian and other such traditions, human beings take their good or bad luck as a sign from God--that poverty or fatal illness might be understood as punishment for wrongs done, or (alternately, but less commonly) as a sign of the god's indifference to men. Therefore, although men may not be in awe of their ill luck, they may be in awe of the god they believe has caused it. In fact, Socrates carefully words his statement about men's sentiments toward poverty and disease, for he says that "many" (and hence, not all) humans dread these things, from which we can infer that awe-filled religious sentiments are not universal; and that perhaps where one man may be in awe and dread of poverty, another man may simply dread it. Indeed, when he turns to a consideration of the things which men *are* in awe of, not only does he give no specific examples of such things, but he extends his hypothesis only to "anyone" who feels awe and shame (12b), thus once again suggesting that not all human beings have a sense of

awe.

Turning to a discussion of those who *do* experience awe, Socrates suggests that these are also the ones who typically care about their reputation. In explicating his logical point, he introduces into the discussion some heretofore unused terms, coupling "dread" with "fear" and "awe" with "shame". Although they are related in meaning, "dread" and "fear" are obviously not synonymous terms, and neither are "awe" and "shame". And, in light of the poetic illustration Socrates is making, they also invite analysis along the lines of set/subset. Presumably, Socrates does not employ them superfluously. On a superficial level, we can observe that although it is understandable that a man in awe of a god is, in a sense, "ashamed" before that god, shame is more commonly experienced as an emotion before other human beings (cf.15d). And, "dread" as opposed to "fear" is the term human beings tend to reserve for a special kind of fear (i.e., it is a subset of fear), fear of the unknown or unimaginable--fear or foreboding of death or divine powers, for example. So by introducing the all-too-human emotions of fear and shame to help "explain-by-association" dread and awe, Socrates seems to express man's relationship to the gods in terms of his more familiar relationships with other human beings, and this is in keeping with the pattern employed throughout the dialogue of retaining (even emphasizing) an anthropomorphic--and thus more readily intelligible--conception of divine beings.

In addition to these newly introduced, exclusively human sentiments, we can observe that any mention of the "gods"--besides the initial poetic allusion to "Zeus"--is conspicuously, glaringly absent from Socrates' explication of the awe-dread analogy. [60] He simply asks Euthyphro, "...doesn't anyone who feels awe and shame in some matter also fear and dread a reputation for villainy?" (12b-c); thus we are invited to *assume* (but need not assume) that the "matters" under discussion actually are about, or concern, the gods. He thereby leaves open the possibility of considering the question of awe and dread as it relates to the realm of human things. *Reputation* also seems to be a peculiarly human concern, being what other men believe is true about a person. Shame is closely related to reputation, for it

[60] Ibid.

seems to be the primary reason men *care* about their reputation; quite apart from utilitarian considerations, they simply don't want to be thought badly of by other men. This, in turn, suggests a view of the political relationship between piety and justice. For justice to work in the city, there are two things which can constrain men to an obedience to the laws in the absence of their being thoroughly persuaded of the inherent rightness of lawful behavior: their fear of punishment, and their concern for reputation. Both of these, however, are fundamentally dependent on the appearance of justice.

But this does not seem to account for the whole picture of dread and fear and awe and shame. To begin with, a concern for reputation does not seem to offer a complete account of men's shame and awe. For to say that the care men have with respect to the all-seeing, all-knowing gods is simply an extension of their concern for reputation misses the point. Any human being who truly believes in the gods fears that they might see his very thoughts, or more importantly, that they will see into his very *soul* and judge him in the most absolute sense: that they see the *reality*, not (as men do) the mere appearance. Interestingly, the term "soul" goes unmentioned in this section,...and in the entire dialogue, for that matter. Euthyphro never talks about piety in terms of the soul, and Socrates apparently makes no effort to correct this defect in Euthyphro's view. [61] If indeed piety is properly defined in terms of man's caring for his soul in relation to the divine things, then piety is also related in several ways to philosophy, but the term "philosophy" also is never mentioned in the dialogue. Euthyphro, who pays no attention to the soul, is as unprepared for this higher notion of piety as he is for philosophy.

The *Reputation* account of awe and shame is also incomplete insofar as Socrates gives no indication of *why* men feel shame in certain matters. The Athenian laws were believed to have been passed down through the ages from the gods to men, that is, from their divine ancestors, to whom men in the city owe their prosperity and their very existence. Now, in any regime where the laws are traditionally regarded as being divinely sanctioned (whether through ancestral derivation, as in Athens, or modelled on divine teachings, as in the Judeo-Christian

[61] Ibid., p.31-32.

and Islamic traditions), there exists a restraint beyond the reputation and fear of humanly administered punishment: the special *dread* that the all-seeing gods will pass judgement on a wrongdoer and punish his actions, either here or elsewhere. Because of its power to enhance the observance of justice in the city, even those men who do not believe in their hearts that the officially recognized gods exist, may nonetheless do what they can to promote traditional piety, beginning with their setting a good example of it themselves.

Presumably, Euthyphro makes no such connections between piety and justice on the one hand, and Socrates' poetic illustrations on the other. Nevertheless, he thinks he has clearly understood the philosopher's point and gives his assent to the conclusion that where pious is, there too is just, but not the opposite. Now Socrates once again focusses on finding a definition of the pious, or at least a suitable description of it. That is, he now seems ready to accept the kind of answer that he earlier rejected on the grounds that it did not express the *eidos* of the pious, but expressed a certain affection for the pious (cf. 11b). He restates the number analogy ostensibly to simplify Euthyphro's grasp of the problem. This time, however, but without calling any special attention to it, Socrates employs "two-dimensional", or "geometric" numbers.

> Now if you were asking me about one of the things mentioned just now, such as what part of number is the even and what this number happens to be, I would say "whatever is not scalene but rather isosceles (12d).

He also introduces the reverent (*eusebes*) back into the equation:

> ...try to teach me what part of the just is pious, so that we may also tell Meletus not to do us injustice any longer and not to indict us for impiety, on the ground that we have already learned sufficiently from you the things both reverent [*eusebes*] and pious [*hosion*] and the things not (12d-e).

Euthyphro's response to this request seems to suggest, once again, that reverent (*eusebes*) and pious (*hosion*) are one and the same, for he says the part of the just that is both pious and reverent is the tendance of the gods, whereas the other, so far unnamed, part deals with the tendance of men. Thus we are invited to conceive of justice as having two distinct parts, one part being justice to gods, the other justice to human beings. Not surprisingly, given the unorthodoxy he has already displayed throughout the dialogue, Euthyphro's definition does not reflect an important aspect of the tradition, namely, that "piety" is also involved in the

tendance of human beings, and in particular, of parents. Socrates' own exposition of the relationship between piety and justice through the awe/dread analogy blurs the distinction between the tendance of men and that of gods. Beyond the fact that all notions of "tending" appear to be anthropomorphic in character (as will soon be brought out), traditional piety seems to involve obeying *the laws* according to ancestral custom; so by being lawful towards other men, one is also being pious. Moreover, piety may even be manifested to some extent by a person's sense of shame before his fellow humans.

The question of what the other part of "justice" is called, this justice of tending men, goes unaddressed. itself raises questions about the completeness of the consideration piety is given in this dialogue. Socrates allows Euthyphro to treat "justice" as though they both know what it is, but we know from the *Republic* that learning all about justice is an immense task. If, however, we consider it from the point of view of practical justice--civic justice--we may conclude that several key components of civic justice as well as civic piety were included in Socrates' awe/dread analysis. For simple dread of punishment as well as shame and fear of a villainous reputation accounts for man's tending to other men--his justice towards other men--just as dread of the tremendous power of the gods and their ability to see into men's souls may account for their awful tending of the gods. This might explain Socrates' reintroduction of reverence (*eusebes*) along with piety (*hosion*). Perhaps reverence is entailed in the tendance of men (e.g., in a genuine respect for the law and its ministers). In Euthyphro's own words--which Socrates says "appear noble" to him (12e)-- "...that part of the just is reverent as well as pious which concerns the tendance of gods, while that which concerns the tendance of human beings is the remaining part of the just" (12e). Perhaps, then, we might conclude that "the remaining part of the just" simply entails reverence. What is pious then is also reverent, but what is reverent is not also pious, i.e., the pious is a subset of the reverent.

Socrates wants to know what Euthyphro means when he says that piety is a "tendance" (or care) of the gods. He feels certain that Euthyphro isn't talking about the same sort of care men employ with concern to certain animals, such as horses, dogs, and

cattle, as manifested especially by the various experts who tend to them. Indeed, he even emphasizes the fact that it is *not* everyone who is able properly to tend these creatures, but the few who know and are *skilled* with regard to these practices; the one skilled with horses in the case of horses, the huntsman with dogs, and the hersman with cattle (13a-b).

Socrates raises the question of who in particular has knowledge of tending gods. This question draws attention to Euthyphro's dubious claim of special and superior wisdom about piety, for according to Greek tradition, piety is something all men are expected to practice--which seems to suggest that they are all considered to be adequately knowledgeable about piety and, with the assistance of religious officials (priests and oracles), are capable of "tending" the gods. But the question goes unaddressed, for Socrates immediately asks to know the *purpose* of the various tendances he has mentioned. He suggests that every such tendance is for the good and benefit of the one tended, observing that the horse, the dog, and the cattle are benefited and become better because of the arts mentioned. Euthyphro agrees, swearing by Zeus to the contrary when Socrates asks if it might be for the sake of *harming* those tended.

At last, turning to the tendance of the gods, Socrates asks if piety too is a benefit to the gods and makes them better. This question and its implications seem to have a jarring effect on Euthyphro, and when asked, "and would you concede that whenever you do something pious, you make one of the gods better by your work?", Euthyphro, again swearing in the name of Zeus, emphatically denies it (13c). The thought of mere humans making improvements to the immortals certainly does not fit with Euthyphro's conception of piety, any more than it would for the typical Athenian.

Upon first reading, Euthyphro's perfectly normal reaction (which Socrates doubtless anticipates) seems warranted. What Socrates is saying seems preposterous--how could it be possible that men make gods better? Yet, in light of the accusation against Socrates, that he is a "maker of gods" (cf. 3b), the suggestion is not altogether ridiculous. If there are poets, makers of our conceptions of gods who in this special sense "care for the gods", surely it is possible that they make better and worse "images" or conceptions of gods. The good poet of gods, according to Socrates' analogy of the animal husbandman, would care for them,

protects them, and "make" them the best kind of creatures they can be--domestic "creatures", that is, which have some practical purpose with respect to human beings.

Also like the skill of the animal husbandman, the good poet's skill is an expertise that not many human beings share, but only the knowledgeable few. Thus, according to the analogy, the kind of piety the good maker practices--this special "tendance" of gods--is not a virtue to be found in all men, but only those who have the appropriate skill or wisdom. But despite Socrates' explicit suggestion to the contrary, a "skill" with horses/dogs/cattle (as possessed by the horseman/the huntsman/the herdsman) is not simply confined to "a tendance" of those things. A huntsman does more than tend his dogs and the one skilled with horses does more than tend the horses; his skill must include, for example, a knowledge of getting horses to do what *he* wants them to do. These "tendances" are themselves then subsets of a larger skill. So, in keeping with the analogy, "tending the gods" is a sub-category of some greater art or body of knowledge. This squares with the notion that the pious is a subset of the just--which holds that only the truly just man can be truly pious.

To continue with the analogy: human beings tend animals ulitmately and primarily for their *own* benefit, not for that of the animals. The horse is trained so that it can carry a man, especially in war; the dog is trained so that it can serve the huntsman in tracking down game; and the cattle are watched over by the herdsman in order that they might be preserved to provide milk, hides, meat, but especially labour or work. Although it is in man's interest to bring out the best in these creatures, this "best" is judged from the standard of the *human*: it is not the best horse or dog or ox simply, but the best *for human purposes*, enhancing human life. Correspondingly, the suggestion seems to be that the tendance of the gods is also such a life-enhancing activity. The "best" god made by men would be the one which benefits us most. In keeping with a thread spun throughout the dialogue, the best conception of gods is one that enhances the nobility of human beings. Because (as the example of Euthyphro reminds us) there *is* a natural tendancy to treat gods as examples (and do what they *do* rather than what they *say*), there is a need for "noble gods", i.e., noble conceptions of gods.

Euthyphro, oblivious to these implications, is only sensitive to the surface of Socrates' argument, and so rejects the comparison of piety to the tendance of domestic animals and eagerly clarifies what he means by "tendance", saying that it is rather the sort manifested by slaves tending their masters (13d). Euthyphro seems in no way nonplussed by his admittedly slavish conception of piety. Once again, Socrates tries to explicate what Euthyphro has said with the help of some examples. He starts by observing that the kind of tendance a slave gives his master is a "skillful service", as skillful service to doctors is for producing health, to shipwrights is for producing ships, and to house builders is for producing houses (13d-e). With these examples in mind, Socrates asks him what *work* the skillful service to gods such slave-like tendance produces, adding that Euthyphro must know this since he asserts he knows these things most *nobly* of all human beings (13e). Socrates' strategy for discovering what piety is now rests on finding out what work the gods do, what their purpose is; he compares them to technicians who produce--once again--some some product for human benefit.

Euthyphro's answer is evasive; although he agrees that he knows such things, when asked with Zeus as his witness to tell what it is the gods produce using human beings as servants, he simply says, "many noble things" (13e). Socrates agrees, for despite the nebulousness of this answer, it carries with in it one aspect which Socrates does not wish to reject--that the gods do produce *noble* things, that their purpose is somehow ennobling. And it prompts him to suggest more examples of noble practices that might by chance spark Euthyphro's wisdom. This completes Socrates transformation of the grounds for evaluating Euthyphro's (and everyone's) conception of the gods: not its truth, but its nobility is the primary issue (cf. 7a, 9e). Socrates reminds Euthyphro that generals also produce "many noble things", but their main one is victory in war, and that farmers too produce many noble things, but their main product is food from the earth [62] And so he requires this self-proclaimed expert on the gods to say what is their main product (14a).

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[62] Note that Socrates does not clearly state that producing food is a noble enterprise. Euthyphro's family are farmers, though he obviously isn't satisfied with just being a farmer.

What is the work that the gods perform using human beings as their servants? What do we learn from serving the gods which benefits in some way analogous to that of subordinates under the rule of a master doctor, or housebuilder, or shipwright, each of whom serves useful human purposes? The noble things the doctor, housebuilder, shipwright, farmer, and general produce are also things which human beings pray to the gods for (health, victory, the means of life itself) --these are perhaps just a few of the "many noble things" the gods *also* are believed to produce. But is not the most truly noble "product" that a human being can have something which benefits his soul? The most noble product conventional piety can aim for, it would seem, is the ennobling of the soul. Over and above the function such piety serves in the ensuring of just behavior in the city, civic piety may also have a beneficial effect on the soul of the individual. Throughout the dialogue, Socrates has evaluated what they were setting down on the basis of its nobility. If the true or highest piety is inaccessible to all but the very few--inasmuch as only a philosophic person can ever hope to approach a true understanding of the divine--then the best more general or common alternative is a beautiful account of the divine, one that has an ennobling affect on men.

It is not surprising that Euthyphro is unable to think of what this main product should be as Socrates presses him for an answer. For even though he is a diviner, neither he nor Socrates so much as mentions the soul in this dialogue. Instead, he hides his bewilderment with an obfuscation, and returns to a fairly conventional notion:

> I also told you a while ago, Socrates, that to learn precisely how all these things are is a rather lengthy work. However, I tell you simply that if someone has knowledge of how to say and do things gratifying to the gods by praying and sacrificing, these are the pious things. And such things preserve private families as well as the communities of cities. The opposites of the things gratifying are impious, and they overturn and destroy everything (14a-b).

Euthyphro's response now carries within itself the seeds of what traditional piety is considered to be, and fits nicely with the five examples of noble *techne* earlier supplied by Socrates. Euthyphro says that the pious activity (the slavish enterprise he described) is doing and saying what is gratifying to the gods by praying and sacrificing, and the result of this activity is the preservation of both private families and cities--the same sort of things that in their various special ways doctors, shipwrights, housebuilders, generals, and farmers produce. The noble

work of the gods, according to this, is the preservation of private families and cities; and by praying and sacrificing we become their servants, suitably acknowledging both our gratitude and subordination to these higher powers. What Euthyphro has described may actually be the "work" that pious men and their gods do, the work according to which we can judge whether both men and their gods are well-made or not.

Socrates appears to be annoyed with Euthyphro. He once again laments the fact that Euthyphro--because of his lack of eagerness--has avoided teaching him what piety is, turning away from answering at the critical moment. This despite the fact that the young man has indeed succeeded (albeit in a muddled manner) in answering Socrates' question concerning what the noble work of the gods is--i.e., preserving private families and cities. Comparing himself to a helpless lover who must follow where his beloved leads, Socrates asks again what Euthyphro says the pious and piety are, this time clinging to Euthyphro's recent concern for sacrificing and praying, and interpreting it to imply that piety is a certain kind of requesting and giving of gifts to the gods (14c). Once again, notice, he defines man's relationship to the gods in terms of human relations--piety is another category of giving and requesting, something we do with human beings as well, such human experience providing the only basis for understanding such matters. Euthyphro, now somewhat more conciliatory, praises Socrates for this, saying he has comprehended "quite nobly". Socrates explains that this is because of his desire for Euthyphro's wisdom, and because he does not wish what Euthyphro has to say to fall (like poorly sown seeds) to the ground in vain. It remains unclear whether Socrates' cultivating of Euthyphro, on the other hand, will turn out to be a fruitful task.

Socrates still requires further clarification from Euthyphro, however. Together they establish that *correct* giving and requesting between men and gods involves men requesting what they need, and gods in turn giving it in exchange for what they need. Thus, Socrates silently eliminates the possibility that "correct" praying is knowing how to pray such that the gods will give men *whatever* they *desire*. Hence a noble conception of the divine would not include gods who could be manipulated in ways detrimental to humans. And Socrates further suggests that this exchange might be described as a certain art of commerce with the gods.

This time, piety is not described as the art or expertise of a superior over an inferior, or that of a slave and his obedience to a master, but that of two more or less equal kinds of beings who can make mutually profitable exchanges of services and goods. And the rewards of piety are presumably commensurate with the work one does in service of the divine.

Socrates wants to know what benefit the gods get from humans, while generously, even eagerly, conceding that there is no good for human beings that does not come from them. Euthyphro immediately corrects this notion, responding that they are indeed "benefited", but only by receiving such things as honor, respect, and gratitude. And, with some prodding, Euthyphro is brought to the conclusion that this gratitude is of all things most dear to the gods (15b). But now Socrates points out that this is the same definition they earlier discarded (the pious is what is dear to the gods). Because of this turn of event, he suggests that they have failed, once again, in their attempt to define the pious, leaving Euthyphro thoroughly confused, once again, by what has passed between them. Socrates foists upon Euthyphro--once more--the title of "Daedalus" because of this contradiction, saying that he is even more clever than that man, since he makes his speeches go around in a full circle. But we should recall that the earlier definition--that the pious is what is dear to the gods-- was refuted under questionable circumstances, and with arguments which, although convincing to Euthyphro, were inherently faulty. In fact, at the conclusion of their discussion of that definition, Socrates pointed out that Euthyphro was indeed describing "a certain *affection* [my emphasis] of the pious" (11a) by saying that it is what is dear to the gods.

Since embarking upon their exploration of the pious as a part of the just, Socrates has apparently desisted in his demand to have a formal definition of the pious. Indeed, they have only really been attempting to *describe* the pious. In this light, Euthyphro's current answer is adequate, although his own mind is too inadequate to be aware of it. And the conclusion Socrates now reaches--"therefore *either* [my emphasis] we weren't agreeing nobly before, or, *if* [my emphasis] we did agree nobly then, we aren't setting it down correctly now" (15c)--serves only to bewilder still further the already bemuddled Euthyphro.

By all indications, what Euthyphro and Socrates are *now* setting down *is* correct (15c). Piety, in its traditional manifestations, involves praying and sacrificing before the gods. The gods get what is dear to them, or at least, and perhaps more importantly, what human beings *presume* is dear to them: honor, respect, and gratitude--much as these things from children are dear to their parents, which seems a likely source of the idea that gods too would find such things gratifying. Thus their journey back to the commonly held views is complete. This is the conception of piety Euthyphro would be "wise" to adopt--one that is suitable for one who does *not* know the divine things well.

Their dialogue under Socrates' direction is made to look like a failure in Euthyphro's eyes. He is left confused, not knowing quite what to think as these more conventional views come to light. Since Socrates cannot reason with him, there is no way of showing Euthyphro that the traditional view is nobler and more suitable than his own--especially for an unphilosophic man such as himself. There is only the hope that Euthyphro will come to doubt his own wisdom enough to incline him towards greater conformity.

Having put his bedraggled "teacher" through all of this effort, Socrates cheerfully suggests that they start all over again from the beginning. He describes his conversation with Euthyphro as some trial he must endure, pledging that he will not voluntarily give up out of cowardice (15c-d); Socrates is not "afraid" about the punishment he might receive nor the "reputation" that may result (cf. 12b). Although he appeals to Euthyphro ("Do not dishonor me, but apply your mind in every way as much as possible and tell me the truth now"; 15d), it is clear that Socrates believes it unlikely to learn the truth here, for he likens Euthyphro to Proteus, the old man of the sea in Homer's *Odyssey* (*Odyssey*, IV, 351-370). There, Menelaos recounts the story to Telemachos of how, on the way home from the Trojan war, he was impeded by the lack of sailing winds. The goddess Eidothea (divine *eidos*) sends him to capture Proteus, who it is promised will tell him what to do. Proteus is difficult to catch, and once ensnared, frightens his captor by changing form into various creatures. Nonetheless,

Menelaos successfully traps the reluctant Proteus, who finally tells him to backtrack on his journey and make sacrifices to the gods. The comparison of Euthyphro to Proteus is flattering insofar as that man was immortal and apparently a knower of all events at all times. On the other hand, it also suggests that Euthyphro is a squirming and unco-operative creature, ever changing his shape to avoid telling what he knows, quite in contrast to the fact that Euthyphro initially seemed quite eager to share his wisdom with Socrates.

The *Euthyphro* seems to end with the recommendation that piety will be achieved by human beings if they pray and make sacrifices, the same recommendation Proteus gives Menelaos. Unlike Menelaos who obediently accepts his prescription and takes advantage of Proteus' prophetic skills, Socrates seems less than fully satisfied when Euthyphro himself says that praying and sacrificing to the gods will preserve the city and family (cf. 14a-b). And even though Socrates like Menalaous is willing to backtrack on his journey, it is far from certain that going back to the beginning with Euthyphro, starting the "lesson" all over again, will ever satisfy his quest.

Socrates' final line of attack is to appeal to Euthyphro's sense of shame. Claims such as Euthyphro makes must be based on knowledge, according to Socrates:

> For if you didn't know plainly the pious and the impious, there is no way that you would ever have attempted to prosecute an elderly man, your father, for murder on behalf of a hired man. Rather, as to the gods, you would have *dreaded* [my emphasis] the risk that you would not do it correctly, and as to human beings, you would have been *ashamed* [my emphasis] (15d).

It has become apparent that Euthyphro does not *know* what he is talking about, and although his "student" continues to humour his claim that he does know these things, as the dialogue proceeds, his sweeping ignorance of these matters gradually comes to light.

Assuming then that Euthyphro is, after all, incorrigibly ignorant about such things, it is dread and shame that should keep him from punishing his father, according to Socrates. All along, Euthyphro has been doing what he thought the gods love, and, because he thinks he knows what the gods love, he considers himself to be loved by them above other human beings. But through clever and carefully crafted arguments Socrates shows him that he cannot give a reasoned account of what the gods love, thus (perhaps) leading the young man to

doubt himself with respect to what he was originally so confident. It seems that Euthyphro cares more about the tendance of gods than he does about human beings; his approach to justice is through his devotion to the gods. Most normal human beings have a healthy sense of familial piety and would be ashamed to have the reputation of doing what Euthyphro is doing. And, if they also have a strong belief in the gods, they dread the consequences of doing something believed to be wrong. Euthyphro, it seems, cannot be appealed to through his shame before other human beings--he considers himself to be superior to those who laugh at him in the Assembly, and even to his own father. But he is serious about the gods. His relationship towards the gods is, as he describes it, pious, but it is unconventional in that he tries to be like them. By leading Euthyphro to doubt the accuracy of his "divine wisdom", Socrates seems to put the "fear of the gods" into him. If he is not ashamed before human beings, at least he will now perhaps dread the gods' reaction to his deeds. This perhaps was Socrates' original purpose in continuing the dialogue with Euthyphro. And, in effect, it is Socrates who, like Proteus sending Menalaous back home to his family, seems to herd Euthyphro back to his family: to desist in prosecuting his father, and to behave in a way that is acceptable to his family members.

By now, Euthyphro is eager to get away from Socrates. He makes his excuses and takes his leave. We don't know whether he proceeds with his lawsuit. Although he usually elicits laughter, the matter with which he is now occupied is deadly serious. But if he cannot make his case before the apparently sympathetic fellow diviner Socrates, he is unlikely to succeed elsewhere. This point, at least, may not be lost on him.

Socrates ends the dialogue with feigned disappointment--as though he had actually expected Euthyphro to teach him the pious, and for that teaching to result in Meletus' dropping the charges. His final words in the dialogue are about what he hoped to gain by knowing the pious, "... I hoped to show him [Meletus] that I have now become wise in the divine things from Euthyphro, and that I am no longer acting unadvisedly because of ignorance or making innovations concerning them, and especially that I would live better for the rest of my life" (16a). As we have noted, there are ample grounds for suspecting that he

had no real hope of learning such things from Euthyphro in particular, but his statement does incorporate the kind of expectations the philosopher has of becoming wise in the divine things. Piety, for Socrates, is to be judged by how it contributes to the way a life is led, making one a better, nobler human being. This is not something he is likely to learn from Euthyphro, except in the negative sense: for reasons beginning with human ignorance about the highest things, a truly noble human being is *not* a religious fanatic. Is the entire dialogue with Euthyphro intended to show *why* impiety should not be a crime... given that there are people (fanatics) like Euthyphro and Meletus in the world.

Piety exists for the sake of some higher end. That is, piety should make human beings better; it should help them to live a better life. Throughout the dialogue, throughout Euthyphro's failed attempt to teach the pious, Plato has presented an alternate teaching of the pious; the pious is to be judged by its nobility, and nobility is to be achieved through a noble conception of the divine--making gods which are fit to imitate and which are portrayed as loving the things which reason tells us are deserving of love. For the many, piety comes in the form of a relationship with elders and with intelligible images of gods. Gods are like "divine fathers", created perhaps to satisfy man's need to explain the cosmos and the otherwise unexplainable, and to give them a concrete way to relate to the idea of the divine. The good maker of gods makes gods worthy of such reverence in order to bring out the best in men. For to be truly pious seems to require an unending struggle for knowledge about the divine things, the forms, as we may suppose. This perhaps is true piety, and if there is such a virtue, it is surely beyond the reach of most men.

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